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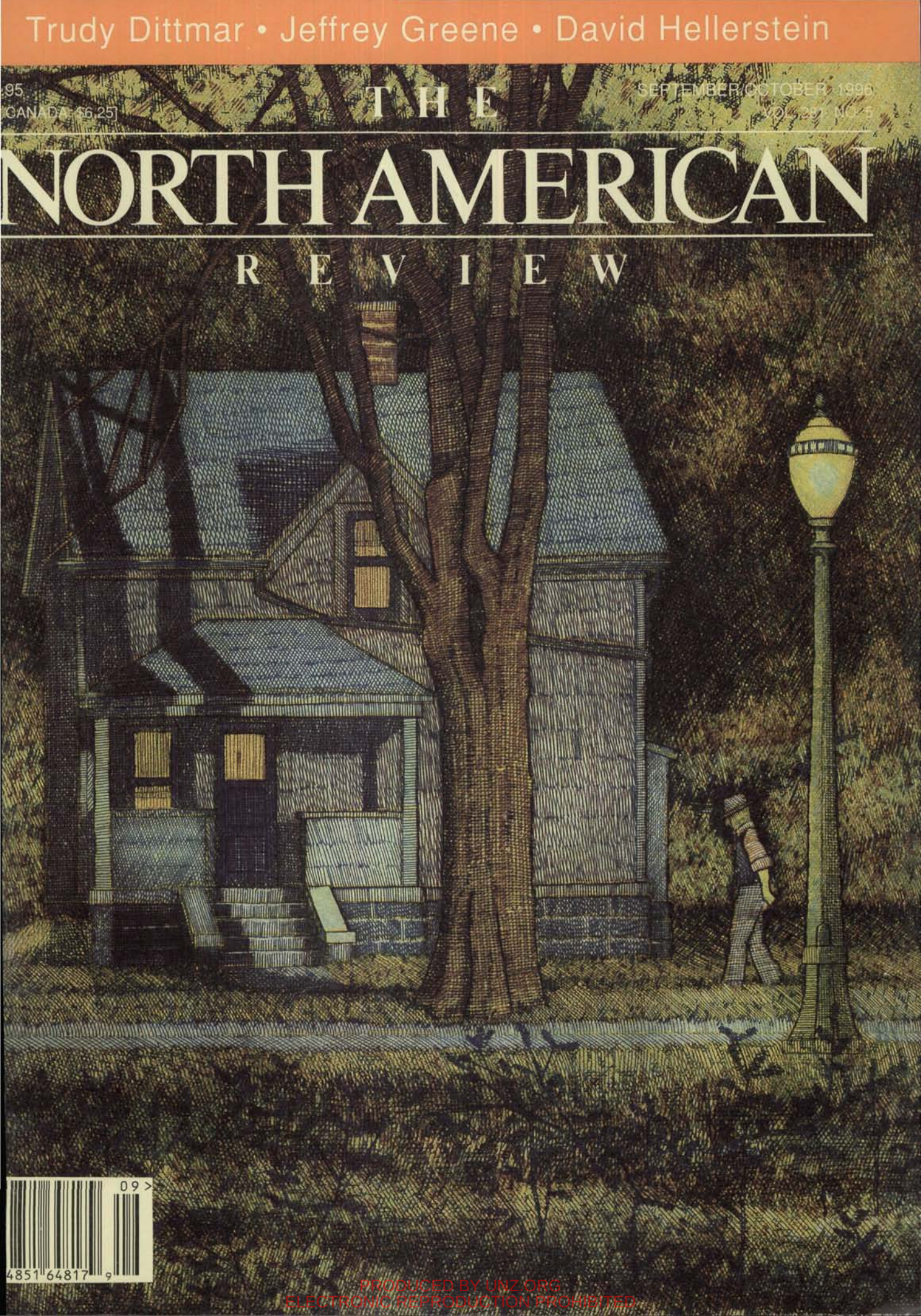

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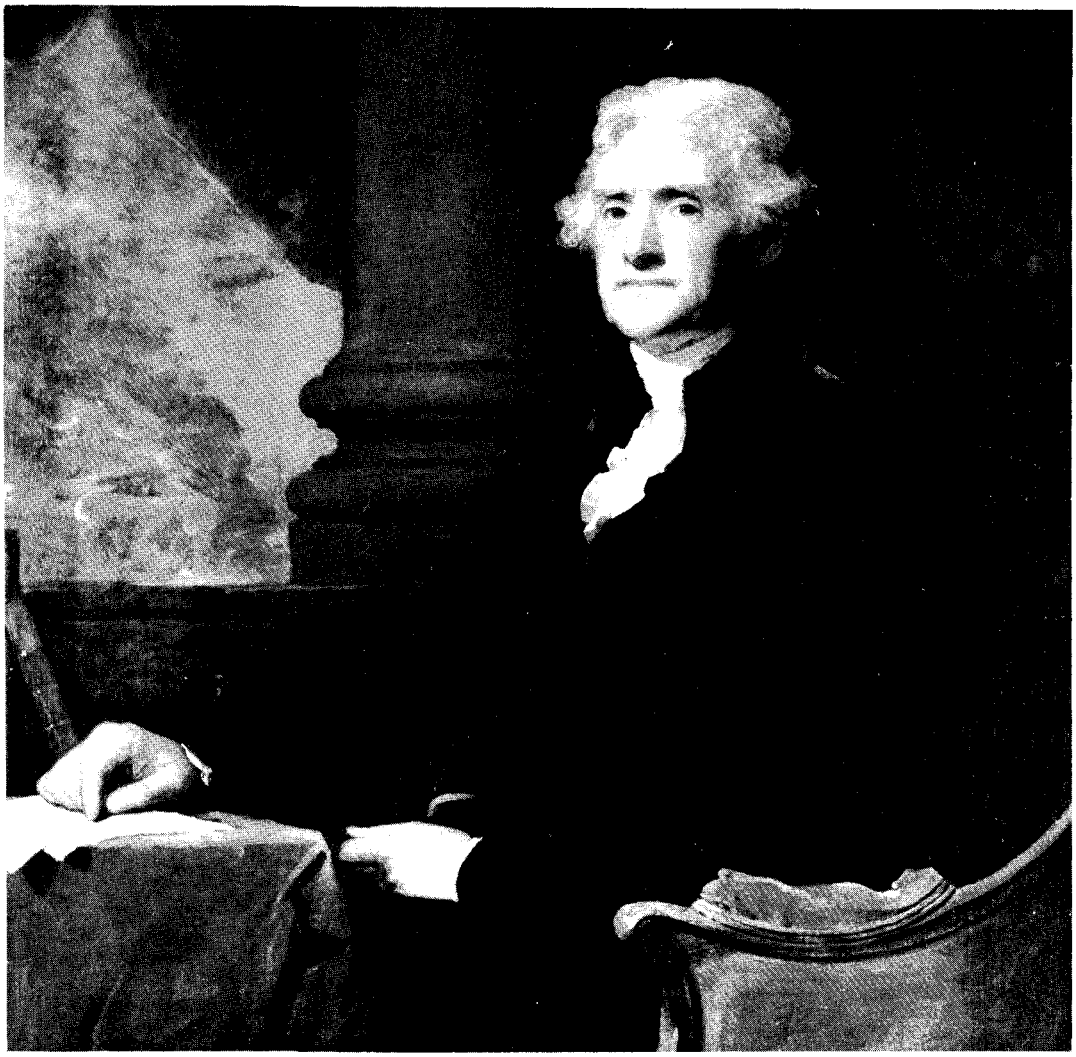

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

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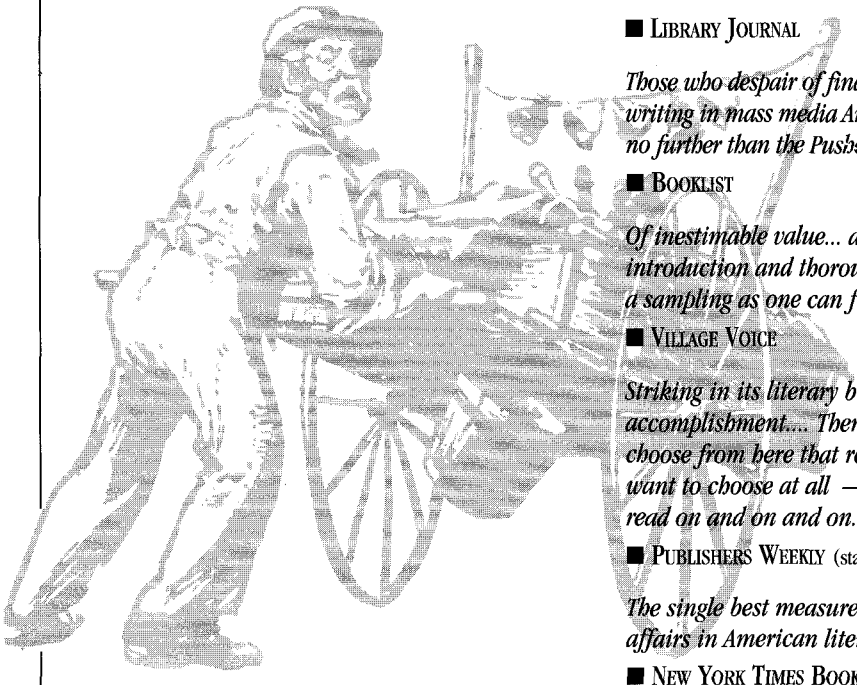

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

If it seems to Constant Reader that we're rushing the seasons, put it down to the sweltering summer it's been. Whatever our unconscious reasons, this number of the NAR is absorbed in matters of cold and snow—witness Dana Wilde's meditations on Maine winters, Trudy Dittmar's animadversions on the inscrutable moose.

On the other hand, perhaps the still and numbing cold is no more affecting than the shock and violence of Jeffrey Greene's "The Squatter"—a racist tale from an earlier day—or David Hellerstein's hospital emergency, "Lili." Either way, the antidote lies with the potpourri commencing on page 25, and the measured calm of this number's poetry. And did we forget to wish you a pleasant autumn?

Of note:Vanda Sendzimir's "Dog Days in China" (November/December 1995) has received a Lowell Thomas award in the Cultural Tourism category of this year's competition sponsored by the Society of American Travel Writers Foundation. Marly Swick's novel, *Paper Wings*, has been published by HarperCollins.

A reminder: With this issue, the cover price of the NAR rises to $4.95, and the annual subscription rate to $22. As we've noted before, we regret the increase, but have held the line for six years against climbing paper, printing, and postal costs, and something—or someone—had to give. We believe the magazine is worth its new price and trust our readers agree.

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THE
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EDITOR
Robley Wilson

POETRY
Peter Cooley

ART
Gary Kelley
Osie L. Johnson, Jr.

ENVIRONMENT
Terry Tempest Williams

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Margaret Atwood, Susan Bergman, Robert Dana, Perry Glasser, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, David Hellerstein, Leo J. Hertzel, Robert L. King, Barry Lopez, Michael Martone, Stephen Minot, Mary Peterson, Barry Sanders, Scott Russell Sanders, Natalia Rachel Singer, Lawrence Sturhahn, Gloria Vando, Eric Zencey

BUSINESS MANAGER
Charlotte L. Wilson

EDITORIAL & BUSINESS OFFICES:
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0516

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Moose

TRUDY DITTMAR

IT WAS EARLY MAY and the woman was out saying a final goodbye to winter. She'd gone up into the high country where the snow was still firm, snowshoeing one last time. She crossed a little meadow and was tromping along not too far from the edge of the forest. It was very bright and hot in this meadow high up in the sun, and she'd just stopped to take off her jacket and tie it around her waist, when suddenly she noticed a cow moose about fifty feet ahead, at the edge of the trees.

The woman saw no sign of a calf, but it's likely that somewhere nearby there was one, because the cow was coming at her. Though she saw this, such details as the flailing forelegs, the boot-sized hoofs flashing down through the air at her, did not really register—it all happened too fast—and when the moose suddenly jerked to a halt and swerved away, she had no idea why. All the woman knew was that at that moment her feet were swept out from under her. She was plowing through open snow for some seconds and then she was plowing along through the trees. Fortunately the blanket of snow was still fairly thick, because by the time the moose got its leg free of the webbing of her snowshoe, the woman had been dragged a good distance. She was scraped and lacerated on all her exposed parts, and she had two broken bones.

You hear stories like these in every barroom in moose country. You hear them told in the morning gatherings of cronies in the local cafés. There are stories of bull moose in rutting season charging head-on into cars, trains, and bulldozers. There are stories of moose in no particular season at all turning on a dime and driving someone up a tree. Sometimes there's a warning: the ears flatten, the mane goes up, the moose does a thing that looks like he's sticking his tongue out at you. Other times there's nothing; the moose just comes. Anyone who spends much time in moose country hears lots of these stories. Though there's often a comical edge to them, they always involve a good bit of damage, and anyone who hears enough of them learns to be circumspect.

One crisp morning in rutting season I see a bull moose in the willows with a rack as wide as a redtail's wingspread. In an instant he's pricked his ears up, and with that giant rack bouncing in the air above him he's taking one of those big one-two-three kind of trots toward me. One-two-three, he stops, looks, and I'm off into the trees, scanning hard for one I can climb. Late one

afternoon in the forest in summer, I'm lost and retracing my steps to a fork in the trail where I suspect I went wrong, when I see a big cow and her calf up ahead just where the crucial fork ought to be, and she's watching me. When the calf tries to nurse, she jerks from him, head tossing, and backstepping respectfully, I show her emphatically that I'm off. The light's lowering, I'm not sure where I am, and to figure that out I need to check the very spot she stands on, but instead I migrate right off the trail and go floundering off through the trees.

Another time, emerging spider fashion from a steep climb through deadfall, I come face to face with a moose on a mountain top, his rump two feet from my destination, the door of my jeep. And still another time, a moose blocks my way on a granite trail, wide enough at his end for him to turn comfortably, but at my end a tad too narrow for me to turn with my pack on—a cliff wall jutting up inches away on one side of me, on the other a precipitous drop. These moose don't threaten, but neither do they make haste to yield. In both cases all I can do is wait for them to get bored and vacate the only path I can take, but I'm spared the boredom that usually accompanies idle waiting by one hearty spritz after another of anxiety.

Moose can be difficult. You try to give them a wide berth. But at the same time they're unpredictable—there's no standard m.o. with a moose. Despite all the bar and café stories, and despite those few times when I felt I was about to be grist for one of those stories myself, in the gamut of moose ways the moments of bluster are far less rule than exception, and almost all my encounters with moose have been very different from what the stories depict. They'll surprise you by what they will do, but what they *won't* do can surprise you more. A moose is enigmatic. A moose is, at times, a bottomless thing.

OF COURSE ON MANY counts a moose is a perfectly fathomable

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thing, no enigma, but quite explicable in terms of its adaptations to its environment. Many of these adaptations are extraordinarily apt and resourceful, prime emblems of how cunning nature's workings can be. And they're all the more prime perhaps, and all the more cunning, because they're frequently effected through features that seem so awkward and nonsensical, even comical sometimes.

No need to go further than the moose's physique, for an example. People who live in moose country have a particularly keen sense of the animal's drollness, and to borrow one local depiction, a moose looks like it got caught in a crusher and smooshed end to end. Its head and neck escaped the crusher, but the big compression pads of the crusher caught it right at the chest and right smack on the rear and squeezed hard, and when the moose came out he had a short little body humped up at the shoulders, his head much too big for it, his legs way too long. In contrast to his black chocolate trunk, these legs are grizzled like an old dog's muzzle, and his neck has a thing called a "bell" hanging from it, a clapper-like furry flap dangling down. The nose end of his face looks too big for the rest of it—his face is nose-heavy, wide and huge-nostrilled, finished off below with a pendulous upper lip—and against the bigness of the nose end of the face, the smallness of his eyes way up back off the muzzle is unsettling. He looks disproportioned and ungainly, a ragtag mix of a lot of things, none of them fully realized—the head an early attempt at something equine; the slope of the back from butt up to shoulder hump suggesting a start on a giraffe, abandoned early, before the designer had the courage to take the design all the way.

But a moose body is far from the work of a crusher, and there's method in the madness of these oddities. The modified giraffe aspect angles the neck well for eating from trees. The rangy legs help here too, for rising on its hind legs a moose can reach branches twelve feet up, and it can straddle saplings, riding them down between its long forelegs to get at the top shoots and leaves. And these four-and-a-half foot high moose legs maneuver easily in all sorts of elements and conditions. Moose can run soundlessly over a littered forest floor at 35 miles an hour; they can move with little effort in snow nearly two feet deep; they can plod over quaking muskegs where other large animals would flounder, swim 16-mile stretches of Great Lakes at a clip, and they've been seen crossing mud holes, buried to the withers in soupy mire. As for the big head, long faces are a standard adaptation of large herbivores, providing space for large grinding teeth to deal with the silica and cellulose of plants, and the moose's extra-long jaws enable him to include in his diet not just the tender herbaceous forbs and grasses and aquatics, but the tough woody plants as well. Then too, the pendulous muzzle, being nearly all muscle, enables him casually to strip shoots of their leaves, and the long snout contains phenomenal numbers of nerve endings, enabling him to detect the faintest smells. And though a moose isn't averse to sticking his head under water (they've reportedly uprooted aquatic plants from 18 feet deep) the long face lets him browse much underwater vegetation while keeping his eyes on what's going on around him, if he likes. Although his vision isn't reputed to be the best at midday, it's good in dim light, and he can rotate his eyes independently to front and rear, so he can even watch behind him without turning his head. Even the strange "bell" or dewlap has a beneficial function, for in addition to being a visual status symbol for males (the bigger the better), it's also thought to be a retainer for a special saliva containing sex pheromones.

It's always a little startling, the moose's oddness, the silliness of his disproportions, as if nature had played a joke on him, but all these idiosyncracies give the moose flexibility, they expand his ecological niche, so as curious as they are, you can get to the bottom of them. But though these oddities, once deciphered as deft adaptations, explain the moose rather nicely, they don't cover all the ground for me. You can see a moose every day and not fail to be struck by these oddnesses, these sillinesses, even once they've been explained; but eternally striking or not, they're not enough to account for the discomposure I feel whenever I notice a moose watching me.

WHENEVER, DURING my rambles, a dark place in the landscape materializes into a moose, what really startles me is the way he just stands there, looking. There's a thicket of willows up ahead, or a little pool choked with water plants, or a shadowy jumble of evergreen trunks, and suddenly the image of a moose coalesces within it, and I'm unnerved by the exotic stillness of him. Some would attribute his composure at these moments to bad eyesight. He's not just standing looking at you, they'd say; he doesn't see you at all. But in all these cases, whether he's seen me or not, he's heard me, he's smelled me—whatever. For who knows how long, he's known I was there. In all these cases, a deer would have frozen, then bolted. Ears sharp, an elk would have focused intently for an instant, and then he'd have been only a rusty flash among the trees. Other members of the family Cervidae are always nervously vigilant, but the moose just stands, looking. He's focused enough, sometimes quite alert, even stirred up. But most often he is merely casual, not frozen as if hoping for camouflage, but fidgeting nonchalantly, nipping buds or munching aquatics as he watches, chewing cud, flicking his ears at flies. His stillness is not lack of motion so much as cool silence and calm—and it unsettles me.

It's as if moose have a big still place in them, like a deep lake whose surface is never ruffled, its waters dark, cold, shining, and smooth. They are like the rocks in a landscape, the cliffs, the outcroppings. It sets a jolt in my blood, this

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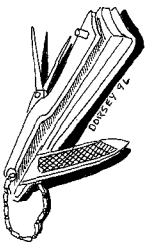
quality, so alien in a wild animal. It triggers an eerie thrill.

Of course, you might chalk this quality up to a position of sureness. Only wolves and bears are their enemies—bears only when they're wounded, and in this country there are no more wolves. But in the fall I see the trucks go through town with moose dead in the back, long grizzled legs jutting up out from under the tarps, big palmate antlers jutting out just beside them, their heads now where their butts should be. And so the position-of-sureness theory doesn't quite work for me.



A moose can be dangerous, I know that, but when all is said and done he rarely threatens, rarely uses his formidable store of fierceness on anyone; and as if this were some kind of Eden—as if god were in his heaven and all was right with the world—when faced with a gun a moose many times just stands there, looking on. It is as if moose were informed with a simplicity so pristine that they don't grasp life's dark complexities. It is as if they are victims of a kind of innocence, cruelly exploited. How do you *really* explain such behavior?

ON THE COLDEST of days in a very cold time, a moose came to my doorstep. He came in a dream. It was not a sleeping dream, and not a daydream either, but a waking dream that was focused, although I, the dreamer, had no idea on what. But there was a focusing, a searching on the part of the dreamer, a stretching of all the invisible insides of the dreamer toward something. It was a focusing not *on* a thing, but *of* a thing: the dreamer's heart.

I was in my cabin, a dark speck on a bare knoll over 8000 feet up the leeward slope of the Wind River Mountains, just a few miles from the pass that traverses the western end of the range. Through the fine snow sifting down outside the windows you could see no farther than a few feet. Without sensory clue, I knew there was a visitor. I opened the door. He stood close by the doorstep, a huge dark form suspended in an ether of snow.

He didn't speak, but I heard him. He said to follow him and I did. Down the knoll and over the bench to the riverbottom. Across the river and up through the trees. Over the ribbon of snow that in summer is the road to the pass, and into the trees beyond it, climbing through them up sharp-planed slopes and down their nether sides, then up and down again, over wave upon wave of trees.

Climbing and impossibly climbing, effortlessly, the moose form just ahead of me slow and indifferent and steady, like the constant procession of the planets traveling their ellipses, the perpetual spinning of the atoms in their orbitals.

Then we were at the top of Union Peak, on the crest of the highest slab of all the raw jagged slabs of granite that protrude from that mountain's top like massive knife blades standing on edge. And suddenly, as if I were two people, observer and observed, I saw myself from a long distance, as if through a telescope back in the cabin I'd left behind. I saw myself there on the slab at the moose's side, the two of us distant and tiny yet oversized in proportion to our surroundings, and despite all the snow sifting down through the miles between observed and observer, silhouetted sharply against the sky.

Standing beside him, I touched the moose's neck. I didn't stroke it, but simply laid my hand upon the side of it, flat. He stood motionless, made no reaction, but his lack of reaction itself was a kind of response. He was a moose and he let me touch him, and I felt the life of him.

He never betrayed the faintest awareness of me. You would have thought he was alone. It didn't matter; alone or not, he guided me. He stood at the top of an undistinguished peak in the storm of winter and looked out from it, and I followed his gaze and saw what he saw.

For a few moments the land was rushing before us, like a fast-forward of terrain photographed from an airplane, and us flying in it, our eyes the camera's eye. We stood stationary on our mountaintop and the land rushed south to north at us as we scanned down the southwestern slope of the Wind River Mountains, into the plains below, on down over their vast sweeps to Rock Springs and past, toward the southern border of the state. We scanned south or it rushed north, one or the other, all of it snow, all of it empty landscape, bleak and cold and lifeless with snow.

And then the rushing had stopped and there was the huge white curve of the top of the world, not south any longer, but the cold arc of ice which held the North Pole. Then that curve of ice lengthened, we saw a vast arc of the globe, many degrees, and then we had a still more distant view. We saw down past the vast cap of ice to where the landforms started, the Scandinavian peninsula, its great lobes flat and edged with intricate indentations, sharp-edged as a sawblade and totally white. Beyond, a vast expanse of Eurasia, cold and still and white. A third of the globe white and inert and silent encompassed in our view, even as we stood on the rock blades of the mountain looking out over ridges of forest behind vast veils of falling snow.

White and white, nearly the whole eastern part of the Northern Hemisphere, every peninsula of it, its coastlines hard-edged and sharp white against winter gray sea. I kept looking, expecting something, a bit of motion, a spot of color, something to hook onto, but all the way down, as the curve lengthened, as the expanse grew, revealing more and more of the world, there was nothing but snow-covered continent and grey water all the way down.

It lulled me, that dream. There was a peace in it. All still, all white. Beautiful. But cold. So cold and still it frightened me that this should be my vision, that when I called out for a truth, this was what the moose showed me.

THERE'S A THEORY that evolution

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is based on a struggle among genes, not bodies. It represents a twist on the traditional Darwinian view. In the competition for fitness (i.e., to leave more offspring), natural selection rewards individual bodies with variations best adapted to the environment, with the result that as their descendants increase in numbers, their species evolves into one which embodies universally these particular adaptations. Individuals are the basic unit of selection, say traditional Darwinians, while genes, which furnish the ingredients of variation, are just outfitters, as it were. But biologist Richard Dawkins' theory of genes as the agent of Darwinian processes would have us recognize that the gene is the true replicator on this planet, not the moose, not the fruit fly, not us. After all, in sexual reproduction an organism doesn't make a precise copy of itself, a gene does. And whereas the particular organism is relatively short-lived, the tiny bit of hereditary material Dawkins defines as a gene is long-lived, as it (or the information en-coded within it) passes intact not only through generations of a species, but often beyond species, sometimes even throughout all the five kingdoms of life, informing everything from humans to willows to morels to kelp to streptococci. The bodies genes pass through are just vehicles, says this theory, each a unique and temporary combination of genes; but the genes (unless zapped by mutation) are constant, reproduced unaltered again and again. And since the true replicator is the gene, not the organism, says the theory, it's not the organism, but the gene that's the contender in the struggle for fitness, while bodies like us, moose and humans, are secondary.

Ultimately, the gene works not for individuals or species or any other taxonomic division, but for itself. "Natural selection favors those genes that manipulate their own propagation," says Dawkins, and so the gene programs us organisms, its vehicles, to do whatever is necessary to increase its numbers in the gene pool. And if we humans have deceived ourselves in this matter, thinking that we bodies are the ones with the stake in the struggle, it's because in organisms as complex as we are, the most effective programming plan hit upon by genes so far in the course of their evolution is to help us cope with limitless unpredictable environments by setting us up with an enormous plasticity of mind. Subject as our intelligence makes us to vast combinations of circumstances, it behooves our gene passengers, in short, to provide us with a consciousness so sophisticated that as decision-makers—at many levels of action, at least—we're emancipated from our master genes. That we're deluded in this matter is to be expected. It's hard to detect that we're mastered, when we are also master. Hard to detect that we're vehicles when we also have a big share of free will.

I hadn't yet heard this theory the day I had my moose dream, but many of its implications go hand in hand with intimations that raked my soul that day, and it may well have been the tip of some such iceberg that I was intuiting when the moose showed me the picture of a winterbound globe. The theory has its critics, and being no more than a casual student of such things, I can make no claims for its validity other than to note that some fine scientific minds (among them Francis Crick, of the double helix) have received it enthusiastically enough to build upon it. All I can say is that here and now, many moons past the day of the moose dream, I find the paradoxical logic of it all quite compelling, even rather lovely. But if it's true, the world is a colder place.

And we are cold in it, if it's true; and not just in what openly passes as our darker side—we've been inexorably forced to acknowledge the predatory protoreptilian parts of ourselves—their work is everywhere and hard to escape—but even by virtue of what we call our goodness, we are cold. For "natural selection favors those genes that manipulate the world to ensure their own propagation" and if a "superficially selfless" gene (as another writer has called it) will do better at getting its information passed on, then even altruism rears a selfish head.

There are all sorts of animal behaviors that involve altruism. Mice, for example, engage in grooming each other, and it seems a benevolent thing for them to do. But mice separated from other mice develop nasty sores on parts of their heads they can't reach, and so when one grooms another it's likely not out of good will alone. Support is offered in exchange for support. Altruism is reciprocal. Myriad examples of such behavior have been the focus of extensive, distinguished research. A lot of this behavior occurs among kin (ground squirrels screaming to warn relatives of danger); but a lot of it extends beyond kin, occurring among kind, as in the case of the mice mentioned above; and some extends beyond kind, across species (one ant species protects aphids in exchange for sugar they harvest), and even across kingdoms sometimes (another ant species living in the bull's horn acacia attacks all that tree's enemies in exchange for nutrients it produces, and even clips surrounding vegetation competing with the acacia for growing space and light). Throughout the web of living creatures, one after the other is doing something for another in expectation that the favor will be paid back.

I think of an acquaintance who was always flattering others—very effectively generally, but if you took close note, suspiciously much. "She's a compliment junky," a friend said, explaining her. "She puts out as much of it as she can in an effort to get as much as possible of the same thing back." Richard Dawkins wouldn't extrapolate from the evidence of reciprocal altruism in animals to human beings, but some of the biologists whose work

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he draws on would, and so would a number of evolutionary psychologists. According to them we've evolved a stake in good reputations on this sort of basis: if you do good to others, they'll do you good back. At some point in the labyrinthine course of human evolution, they say, via some subtle turn it became important not just to be good, but to *appear* to be good; just leaving the impression of goodness could gain the desired "reciprocation" for us. And the subtle adaptive adjustments didn't stop there. For as humans developed in astuteness, it came about that if we tried knowingly to deceive others we showed our hand in small ways—the others just might see through us—and so it became adaptive behavior to mime our concept of goodness to our own selves, deceiving ourselves about our goodness in order to do a better job of deceiving others about it. Ground-breaking researcher R.L. Trivers has related his genetic model of *reciprocal altruism* (the term is his coinage) to many of our overtly fine moral sentiments, suggesting that sympathy, gratitude, generosity, guilt, righteousness, and others are not as purely virtuous as we've thought all these centuries, but instead have been targeted by natural selection for improving our ability to deceive, to discern deceivers, and to escape having our own deceptions discerned. And all of this is related to getting our genes to the next generation—or, as Dawkins would have it, to the genes getting themselves there.

In spite of myself (and the anguish that invoked the dream moose), when I read of this research and the hypotheses it generates, my intellectual excitement is exquisite. My mind takes in these theories with bated breath. It's all so amazing, this business of the gene that shapes us to shape ourselves for the good of its survival—if valid, it's another gigantic strike for the elegance of the workings of nature —but it's a cold world. With the immense flexibility of our natures we're given the choice of goodness, unselfishness. And yet even our unselfishness is selfish. And even our choice isn't a choice.

You can flip that back on itself, of course. If the choice isn't our choice, you can say, the selfishness isn't our selfishness. It's the gene that's selfish, not the carrier of the gene. If I'm deviously supportive, only superficially altruistic—if I'm too hotly engaged in this struggle for fitness to achieve the disinterest necessary to qualify even my highest feelings as true love, it's not me but the genes in me that are behind it, and I'm off the hook...

THE ARCTIC TERN, though indigenous to the coldest latitudes, flies 10,000 miles to avoid the hibernal extremes of its native habitat Some bats drop their body temperatures to as low as 29 degrees Fahrenheit, and hang themselves up for the winter just about dead. Other mammals increase their body heat. Some tiny ones raise it considerably, insulating themselves underground or undersnow right at the onset of cold weather, but the arctic fox needn't do so until the outside temperature drops below minus 40° Fahrenheit, and even then, with only a minimal increase in body temperature he can sleep safely on open snow at minus 80° Fahrenheit for up to an hour, so well insulated is he, fur covering even the pads of his feet. Some amphibians burrow down into the mud all winter so as not to freeze, managing minimal respiration through their cloacas, even through their skin, while the wood frog buries itself in shallow soil of the forest and, by a miracle of biochemistry, freezes till spring. Although as the water in the spaces between his cells freezes he gets hard as a board, as long as the glucose his cells are packed with keeps the living matter of those cells free of ice, when he thaws out in spring he will start jumping again. As the days grow shorter many plants begin to dehydrate their cells. Consequently, although water by necessity freezes inside the plant, as in the wood frog it does so only in the spaces between the living cells, and so the plant, like the frog, goes on

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living in the frozen state. In some cases even the nature of the freezing within plants is different from usual; in a process called vitrification, the ice forms without crystallizing, so there are no sharp edges to puncture and destroy the cells. And some plants, like spring beauties and snowbank buttercups, even manage to develop while deep within snowdrifts, utilizing the meager light that penetrates snowpack to do some minimal photosynthesis.

Dealing with cold isn't easy. It requires ingenious biological plans. But even the cleverest accommodations to winter fail to exempt the plant or animal from the rigors of cold. There's always a sacrifice; winter exacts a harsh toll. It inflicts brutal physical hardship. Sometimes it dictates total suspension of activity, even of consciousness; the very life of some organisms is in abeyance for months at a time. Even then, winter kill is a fact of the season; whatever plan a species follows, there is always a percentage of the population that doesn't make it through. But tough on the world as it is, winter is not evil. It has nothing to do with morality. It's just a neutral coldness, part of the cycle of things. While one pole of the earth has its turn tilting toward the sun, the other tilts away from it, that's all.

THE MOOSE PAYS his winter dues like everyone. He makes a modest migration, not far south generally, mostly just down from the mountaintops, though because of his long flexibly jointed legs he needn't even make the trip too early, deferring departure from subalpine bogs and creek bottoms, if he wishes, till the snowpack is close to two feet. He makes a dietary adjustment, switching from nutritious pond weeds, sedges, and tender leafy shrubs to woody shrubs and trees, and this requires increased fermentation time in his rumen to deal with the heavy cellulose load. As his dry weight consumption reduces by half, he metabolizes body fat stored during the summer, losing weight slowly but steadily till spring. To compensate for lowered

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nutrition, he sheds the weighty antlers that would drain his energy (70 to 85 pounds of calcium grown in one four-month season, exceeding all other antler growth), and without going into torpor, he lowers his body temperature, reducing his basal metabolism and thus the energy demand on his food. He starves in bad seasons, if snow is too high; if he's weakened by too poor nutrition, he's susceptible to pneumonia, parasites, other disease, wolves.

Most of his adaptations aren't spectacular, but more often than not they cut the mustard. He has ten-inch guard hairs and a dense woolly underfur—in the wintertime an inch or more thickness of it on the inch-thick hide of his back—insulation to suit him for life in some of the coldest places, the high places in altitude and latitude, boreal forests of circumpolar lands. When the grasses and ferns and low shrubs of summer are two feet under in winter, he rips the bark off aspens with his lower incisors (like all cervids, he has no front teeth in his upper jaw), and straddling aspens weighed down by ice, he bends them down farther, to get at the finer twigs at the top of the tree. With his long, loose-hinged legs he moves fast even through deep snow, and when the snow surpasses the comfortable limit, moose, like deer, do a thing called *yarding*, several of them staying in a small area, or yard, and continually packing the snow down in a number of criss-crossing trails. Snow, in fact, is his winter comforter; when things are at their roughest he burrows down and insulates himself with a covering of it.

It's said that in the Middle Ages European moose were sometimes used as draft animals in Scandinavia, drawing sleds long distances through deep snow much faster than relays of horses could. It's even been reported that American moose were occasionally broken to harness. I don't have too much trouble believing it. Until not long ago some miles west of me there was a couple who hosted gatherings of moose every winter for years. All they did was put out plenty of hay and the moose came back and stayed every winter, munching around in their yard from November to April, clomping around on the hay bestrewn wooden deck that belted their house, and if the couple had wished it, I bet at least some of their moose guests would have stood for being harnessed up.

The moose is as winter a creature as almost any. His adaptations aren't as dramatic as those of some organisms, but in their understated way they're about as effective—in fact, in allowing him to go about the business of living almost as freely and fully in winter as in summer, they're more effective than most. When winter comes, the moose doesn't go around it or away from it, he doesn't switch to a whole new game plan, he doesn't shut down; he just lives in it, taking it as it comes as straightforwardly as he takes summer. He does more than survive the cold world; he makes it his home. Like my dream moose, he moves through it with something like the sang-froid and disinterest that characterize nature itself.

LAST SPRING I STOOD on a rise at the border of forest. The pink petals of least lewisias hid beneath the new blades of grass at my feet. At the bottom of the long, steep slope below me there was a trickle of a stream and a deep streambank, eroded—an expanse of watery mud, black and textured with pocks. I saw something moving, and then he materialized, as usual. It was a bull moose in velvet, in mud above his knees. He was stuck, and even those long, loose-hinged legs wouldn't get him out of it. He plunged and plunged, and it was to no avail. His feet were tangled in submerged roots perhaps, or perhaps due to illness or age he was simply too weak to defeat the suction's drag. But the moose showed no signs of panic. He worked for a while and then rested with complete unconcern. I'd once read an account of something similar, but hadn't quite believed it. The writer was a high level national parks official who'd watched a moose plunging in a quicksand of volcanic ash, and that's how he'd put it: between times he "rested with complete unconcern."

I stayed for a long time and watched him. But I was far from camp, and finally I had to leave. Still, I stayed for close to two hours and watched him, as he plunged and rested and plunged and rested, and when I left he didn't look any closer to getting out. Perhaps when the temperature dropped that night the mud would firm up and, the suction reduced, he'd get a foothold. If a grizzly didn't happen upon him first. I left reassuring myself with that rather strained notion. Perhaps the coldness he knew so well how to live with would save him here.

I PHILOSOPHIZE ON the neutrality of winter. On the beauty of the cold world the moose showed me. But when a bear surges over the top of the hill before me and, in his rolling gait, pours down its side toward the trees where I stand, it's all I can do to keep my wits about me. My heart can soar at the notion of the vast indifferent plan of nature, I can theorize what I theorize, I can know what I know, but when even just the metaphor for death comes, my heart freezes in me. I'm as far from the peace of that dispassionate power as I can be in those moments. Is the rest all delusion, hypocrisy?

The image of the moose in the mud says it isn't. Even the bones on the porch of my cabin this bitter fall morning say no. I went up to look before the snow should be final and found a profusion of them helter skelter in the willows around that stream, some flecked with matter, dried gut like scraps of rawhide. A long jawbone, a large femur, but I couldn't find a skull. I'd left the jeep on the log road and hiked in on impulse, no pack on, no water. While I was searching, I got more and more nervous as a strange leaden sky filled the east. By the time I got back down to the jeep my whole body was shaking. A fall blizzard on the mountain is beautiful as long as you're not caught in it.

I'd gathered the large ones, the whitest. Back home the books seemed to confirm that some were moose bones. I've spread them in a line under the porch rail. That way, most of the day they catch the sun. □

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LYNNE KNIGHT

None of Us at Prayer

The first morning the dogwood flowered, we slowed down
to watch the petals guttering above the ravine floor. The branches
were candelabra, this had been said many times before, the woods
a cathedral, that too, but we were young, innocent of names
already given. We knew picking dogwood was forbidden,
so we dreamed of sneaking out while others slept to break
whatever branches we could reach and run with them like torches
through the tunnel of oak and maple that by day was just the street
we lived on. We would whirl and spin the white-tipped branches
until the flames thinned, then wait while our senses calmed, the petals
reignited. The first one I touched shocked me with its thickness,
its wet. The four bracts swirled pink at their centers were the wounds
of Christ, the nuns had told us, and if we were pure in prayer, our palms
might open some day and bleed of their own accord as the dogwood bled
while we dreamed our way through the tunnel, lit by our stolen torches.

Years passed and still none of us had dared to pick one branch,
even one blossom, for fear we would be mutilating the persistent body
of Christ, though by now we were old enough to know the stigmata
came from hysteria, probably sexual hysteria, unholy fervor.
And we were old enough to sneer at descriptions of dogwood as
candelabra, at our dreams of weaving white torches through the night.
If we sneaked out for anything, it was apt to be boys, who waited like trees
in the dark and pulled us into them, wordlessly. So whoever it was
who broke the first one off, reached out one morning on the way
to school and slid the jagged branch through the buttonhole
of her blazer lapel, saying *So let them arrest me*, none of us could say
with certainty now. Maybe none of it happened. Maybe none of us
lay dreaming of the flames of dogwood dipping and arcing while we made
our strange circling procession. But we are all marked by it. Look at
my palms, the emptiness. The cathedral in ruins, and none of us at prayer.

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Winter Moons

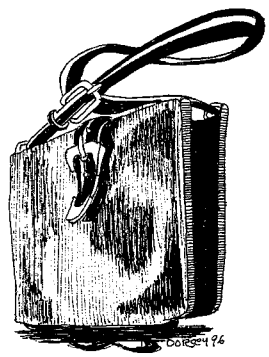
DANA WILDE

"The spruces rough in the distant
glitter
Of the January sun..."
—Wallace Stevens,
"The Snow Man"

HERE IN MAINE, winter is long and cold. In the past it was even longer and colder, or so memory and certain old people suggest. One of Thoreau's journal entries from before 1850 notes without surprise a fairly heavy snowfall in mid-April. That was in Massachusetts, which is still part of the temperate east. Farther north and east, beyond New Hampshire, the Saco River in southern Maine is the accepted anthropological divisor of the Eastern Woodlands region from the Eastern Subarctic region. "Subarctic" refers to a length and depth of winter freeze which is something less than polar. The limits of a subarctic winter might accurately be described as the months when snow can reasonably be expected to bury everything. And in earlier times, the months when food became scarce to nonexistent. Most of Maine drowses through winter from November to April.

By late January the cold has normally been so long and so thorough that it's difficult even to stay awake. The ice grinds everything to a halt, or so close to a halt that for all intents and purposes nothing happens. The roads are frozen, and so are your bones. Snow piles up everywhere, obliterating the driveway and the baseball diamond. In fields the only signs that anything ever lived are dead spokes of grass or a few uncut corn stalks, the occasional raccoon, fox or deer tracks in the snow. You don't want to go outside. You want to stay in where the heat is, smell the wood smoke or the dry, nylon odor of electric coils. The inner staleness of the kitchen, unventilated since October. A house is a core of warmth, like a burrow. It seems unutterably small after a while, but at least it's not frozen. In the cold, we describe even the warm by what it's not.

Cold is the absence of heat. Ice is that pervasive presence in the universe which signifies what is not. Sometimes on really arctic nights the ice—or maybe not the ice itself but its stillness and hardness—becomes fascinating, and I feel sucked outside to see the emptiness. Away from the artificial fires of western culture, which throw smoke and black soot all over chunky roadside snowbanks, the snow in the woods remains purely white, even during its porous melting period in March. The whiteness is a blankness, even more complete than on the ocean surface because it does not move. Billions of tiny frozen water crystals, motionless, piling up around the hemlocks and in the arms of pines, bluish in moon shadows. Everything suspended, waiting for the Sun to come up.



Especially at night. The air is emptied of moisture, and to breathe is to suck in pure cold, like blocks of ice tumbling into your lungs. In arctic cold, -10, -20 F. and colder, a deep breath extinguishes the vascular heat in your chest, and a sharp pain creases your sternum. You breathe slowly to preserve the inner reserves of warmth.

I saw the emptiness completely one moonless January midnight when I walked across the pond to look at Orion. The camp road was slick with crushed powdery snow over a slab of ice. The stars were thick, like magnified crystals in the blackness. On the pond my boots blasted oblong impact pits into the glazed snow. I thought the pond must be frozen completely through to the bottom.

Everything seemed impregnable, as if the cold itself was insulation. In the first stages of freezing there is nervousness. When the chill penetrates your skin, you have a natural inclination to move, which for most people means shivering. As the cold filters further into your bones your body becomes calmer, and drowsiness takes over. A desire to succumb sets in, like a cat settling into a chair, and a fascination for sleep dulls the desire to survive. In its final phase, I imagine, it solidifies into a need to relinquish consciousness completely and become ice. Standing on the pond, binoculars in glove, I kept shivering. The emptiness yawned all around me. Flat, dark ice reposed like a moonscape, sometimes buckling and creaking as if the Earth itself could shiver. In a rough circle around the pond's edges loomed pointed giants, spruces and pines.

It was like standing in a still crater. Rim mountains spoked up all around me. The impact basin was flat, pocked with tiny holes. The arctic cold of the Earth, I thought, is the same as the Moon's, or Triton's, or Charon's. Absence is absence. Nothing is nothing. You can die of sleep as easily here as there. For a few minutes I relaxed. Stars plainly rising over a crater-rim

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scintillated on the edge of the absence, like the fat dreams that come before deep sleep. I was on a moon somewhere, becoming ice.

Without closing my eyes I passed for seconds or an hour outside the normal orbit of human perception, under the snow-encrusted surface of the pond to the stillest, blankest observable territory in these parts. I slid across an empty, godforsaken whiteness and, fortunately for my soul, recognized Europa circling Jupiter half a billion miles away. A place of uncontrollable cold, smooth beyond comprehension because it's wrapped in a frozen ocean, solid ice 50 miles or more straight down. Underneath is more water, not yet frozen, resting on dense, cold rock. For nearly 8000 miles in a circle around Europa's equator there is only ice, unrelieved. Any hills or ridges slope very gradually to a few hundred feet at most. Europa is smoother and rounder than a billiard ball and stiller than an arctic lake.

I flexed my fingers in my gloves. This is winter. Beyond the mania of its three-and-a-half day orbit, Europa's only activity is the creation of more ice. When its surface buckles and cracks, more water and rock fill the fissure and freeze. No one knows exactly how this happens. You might hear a crack like thunder explode the silence, and the ice might jerk and split at sonic speeds beneath your feet, and pressurized water flood suddenly into the crack. Or more likely, the ice warps as it does on the pond, with creaks and twists and throatless barks. Water then seeps in slowly from underneath and freezes in the -270 F. cold. Craters are erased by this process in short periods of time, say 30 million years.

Otherwise there are no shapes or points of reference on Europa, no figures at all. Underneath the ice enormous lines criss-cross like Martian canals, but to someone standing on the surface they'd be invisible and wouldn't exist. There would be nothing to see or hear for millennia at a time, only the disk of Jupiter, 420,000 miles away, filling a sixth of the sky, illuminating flat, unending, polished nothing.

Survival here would involve the generation of motion in utter stillness. The excitation of molecules somewhere, at some innermost area which can hold out the cold. The real activity of winter is whatever supersedes the absence of warmth. On Europa the problem of shelter would concern not only the heat of your physical body but, the same as in Maine, your mind, which would be cooped in by the cold itself, not just the bad or absent roads. On Europa you would invent shapes and figures merely to survive. Your mind would seize upon a gloss of planet-lit ice and thaw it into someplace else.

To be clear: heat is motion. Temperature is a measure of molecular activity. Absolute zero is the total absence of heat energy, the temperature at which all molecular motion stops. This condition is abstractly represented on the Kelvin scale by the expression 0 K. On the Celsius scale it is -273. Fahrenheit, -459. It's difficult to imagine that kind of cold even on Europa, which is relatively warm at -270 F., or in Maine, which is relatively warmer, though not much.

The cold is not the problem because you can always give in to it. You can always sleep, drift away toward death, when your energy subsides. You can extinguish much sooner than absolute zero; human beings seem to succumb to the stillness at levels of inactivity much more active than even Europa's. In arctic Canada people do not go out alone when it's colder than -50 F. The core of what is human can solidify long before hell freezes over.

Even more difficult to imagine in deep cold is the survival of consciousness. On the surface of Europa, as on the frozen pond, consciousness would be simply the search for warmth, which, again, is activity. The moon-blankness is startling in a way, like the blankness of the snow-encrusted pond. The mind shivers at the thought of Europa. It's so cold, it's bright: it reflects Sunlight and Jupiter-light with an albedo (or reflectivity) of .62, in astronomy-speak. The Earth, blue and white in space, has for comparison an albedo of .39. The Moon's is .11. Europa's surface temperature is on average lower than its neighbors' because it actually reflects heat away. Of the four Galilean moons of Jupiter, Europa is (with Io) in a warmer orbital zone than Ganymede and Callisto. In the strain and tug of Jupiter's gravitation, Europa is geologically active deep inside, pushing ice and rock slowly upward in a way that Ganymede and Callisto don't. Io is a different story. It is roughly as cold as Europa at the surface, but a place of volcanoes and sulfur compounds, a burning upper hell in contrast to Europa-Cocytus, lower hell. Triton, circling Neptune billions of miles further on, is the coldest place in the solar system, with a mean temperature of -391 F. But even there, seasons lasting decades alter the surface ice, and eruptions of nitrogen crystals blow through the tenuous atmosphere.

By contrast, Callisto, 750,000 miles beyond Europa, is completely motionless. Its surface temperature is about -253 F., but nothing internal disturbs that surface, at any interval of time. Rocks inhabit its ice, and so it's dark, albedo .17. Callisto's cold, unlike Europa's, takes form. Instead of an absence of shapes and figures, on Callisto things rise up like monsters. Jagged craters cover everything. Most are small, less than 90 miles across, compared to those of other planetary bodies. Most are craters cratered with craters. Astronomers weirdly call these geographic features "palimpsests," as though the craters were trying to tell us something. One impact basin called Val Halla appears to be an enormous exception in size, with concentric rings emanating outward more than a thousand miles. But it too is webbed with smaller craters and has no ring mountains like those on the Moon.

The cliffs and small mountains of Callisto are older than Ganymede's and more motionless than Europa's ice. They loom like the monstrous shadows of frost. They seem to be

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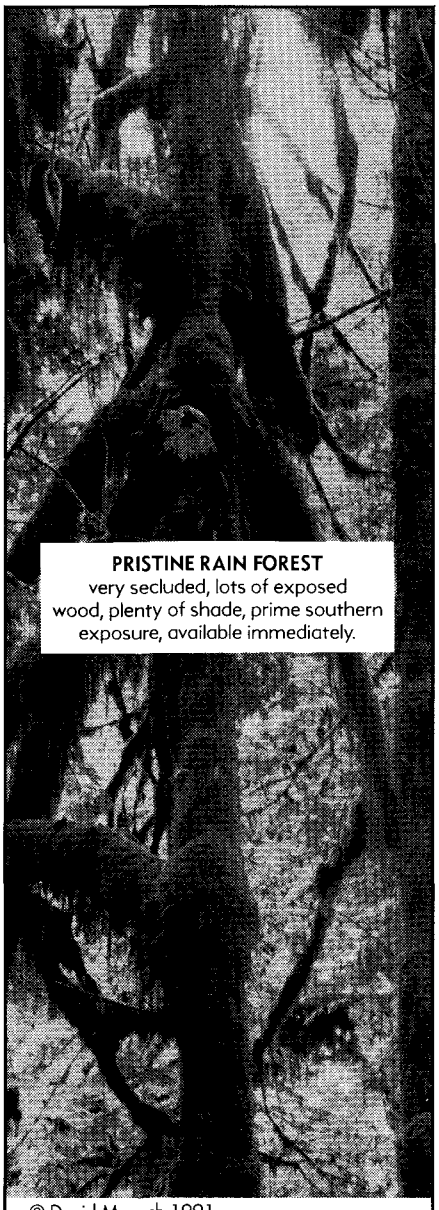
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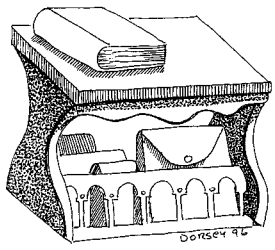
the cold itself, frozen into shapes whose presence intensifies the absence. Apart from its inert, perpetual orbit of Jupiter, nothing is happening on Callisto. The meteorites that billions of years ago blasted out the craters lie in pieces the same as the night they hit. These are hell places. Whatever consciousness can survive here consists in isolated hills and shadows, and the disturbing fantasy that even Jupiter, which at some remote time might itself have shone like a star a thousandth as bright as the Sun, has ceased to pay attention. Its glimmering night-light passively reflects from Callisto's dirty, snowy surface. The dark mountain points and frozen impact escarpments form the shadows of abandonment. Even the Sun is too distant to move anything here.



Those frozen mountains are horrible. They are what you would see if you could somehow see nothing. Europa in its smoothness is in a sense invisible, rejecting everything, every attempt to locate anything. It throws all activity of heat or mind directly into empty space. Callisto outlines what a hole must be, sunken deep toward absolute zero. Except for its rock and ice, it does not, for all intents and purposes, exist.

SPACE CONTAINS our parallel worlds.

A winter night in Maine, like Callisto-night, seems eternal. The jagged spruce-tops in the woods beside the frozen lake point toward burning white crystals, like the mountaintops of Callisto. As I looked up that January night, the darkness seemed like an envelope sealed for good. Daylight would never arrive, warmth would never return. The entire universe for a few moments in the cold was eternally absent.

Winter is night and cold dissolved together. It is the living figure of all absence, and it brings all conditions of absence with it. It came to me that the Abenakis and the red paint people, natives of Maine centuries and millennia before us Europeans, must have understood winter in ways impossible for me. They didn't think of bald Europas or Callistos, but instead moved with the season, entered it, maybe. When the cold had halted everything serviceable to life, the Abenakis looked into the same sky as I do and called the bright full wafer there "Starvation Moon." The clams and mussels that were dried during summer had been eaten, and the deer and moose had all but disappeared. The bears slept, and nothing grew or even moved except in creaking wind and snow. Hunger, they knew from first-hand information, is a condition of nature. It is the living experience of nothing. It could not be defeated because it does not explicitly even exist, except in a figure of the changeable Moon. It could, given the right reserves of caloric and psychic energy, be waited out, the way the drowsiness before oblivion can be blunted.

I, on the other hand, shivering in the snow, knew the wood stove was warming the house. We have ways of preserving bodily heat during winter. But even nowadays in Maine, "cabin fever" is not an altogether figurative expression. Some people fail in winter. The cold grinds everything to a white smoothness. It slows the elbow joints and knees, and seems to freeze the afternoon itself, and evening, to a standstill. The Sun is absent fifteen hours a day here in the dead of winter, the Earth tipped over on its axis out of heat and light. Night enfolds the world by four o'clock. Feeling sealed off, like having claustrophobia in the darkness, people fray, their normal reserve and tolerance evaporate. A winter nervousness sets in that sometimes ends up bad, in fits of rage, or brawls, or worse, for all the world like psychic shivering. In winter we sleep at the edge of oblivion. The place of hell itself. The tops of spruce against the sky

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become ancient, inert mountaintops.

In times before the Abenakis inhabited the Eastern Subarctic, a seed philosopher for modern Europe, Parmenides, pictured two ways of understanding the universe. One way was to think or realize that things actually do exist. To imagine for example Callisto and the Moon out there, with frost mountains. And millennia later to imagine, on one at least, latticed footprints undisturbed for the last 26 years and for 26,000 more. The other way was to study or assume their emptiness. If we rationalize intently about Europa and Callisto for a time, we infer and—right on the edge of possibility, or its failure--almost perceive that they are essentially nothing, essentially void.

But no real information comes back from this way. Focus your mind on absence and things begin to freeze together and become indistinguishable. Pieces of facts, like inert meteor debris strewn around an ancient crater, can be heaped together, but the reality of Callisto or Europa, from this view, is their essential vacancy. You end up chattering about nothing. It's like shouting into an empty chasm and wishing for a rock slide. It's a wish for annihilation, like surrendering to the cold for a quick rest, and sleeping. An Abenaki under the Starvation Moon did not rationalize the absence of meat or the emptiness of her belly. To visualize absence as though it were present reveals eventually the absence of absence, things exactly as they're not. Thoughts of what is not are thoughts of annihilation. Thoughts of annihilation are thoughts of hell.

The problem of winter is to generate activity, to excite molecules to warmth. The cold wants motion, existence of some kind, even a dream. Warmth is generated not by, but among the bare black crater-rims and frost. Not the motion gulped in by the eyes, which at the right depth will freeze over, but the motion generated in desire, which outlives starvation. The pure experience of cold is to inhabit it. Trees purify themselves by dropping leaves and draining sap, and enter January bodily. They neither succumb nor disappear, but occupy winter. There is no more ancient activity in the universe than the seeds of heat inside the cold.

The mind aligns the emptiness. It frames the snow and ice, and zero temperatures, and spruces which are little more than crater-edges. Black, empty space becomes eternally active. Seven crystals magnified in winter air are sisters, Pleiades. Three others are a hunter's belt. Seven in the north become a massive whirling bear. Europa's ice and Callisto's mountains are gateways into hell. Snow is a natural condition of April. Bark in the Adirondacks becomes food. The simple act of waking on a winter morning when the fire is out requires a mind of winter, seeing nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is. And minutes later, out of empty black space comes sunrise. □

KENNETH ROSEN

AUTUMN

The sun pours honey on the objects of gaze.
The sky, in its deepest registrations of blue,
Is an eye which glimpses, stares, and surveys.
The brain collects and forgets in mazes
Of clammy neurons with waxing synapses. In autumn
These are oversweetened and glad. The lurid foils
Of maple and oak on huge scoops of ridge and hill,
Stiffen and give a mutual delicious shiver,
A contraction their flourish of color
Compensates for awhile. Then it all wanes.
Add to this a delicious rock-hard dead-center
Red apple, add a spike of salvia fiery as a tongue
Dying to touch and tickle the mind blind—
(In memory alone, in fact, nobody wants to touch
Hand or cheek, never mind shoulders,
Never mind cross rivers and plains to French-kiss
An ear)—but add the elegant lemon or cherry lollipop
Of a solitary tree, the fractured church glass
Of leaves like girls tossing off kilts,
The moss on rock or tree, the grass
Like emerald candlewax, and add a chaos
Carnival on highway, hillside or field,
An eye orgy, eye alone, and what you have
Is Maine in autumn. *(O spare us not one*
Of thy gaudy pieties, old home, old whore!)
Or what you have is the brain of a man
Half a century or more in the hole, wild as a dog
With a can tied to its tail, half in love
With heaven and earth, half with heaven
And hell and the tom-tom of autumn, where all
Is changing, a dervish of gorgeousness,
And all is a crazed forsaking.

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The Squatter

A Story by Jeffrey Greene

I remember the greasy bill cap that only came off when he bathed in the river, the hand-rolled cigarettes and the scar across his throat that showed when he tipped his head back to drink from an always-open can of beer. Anyone who knew him would agree that he lived on his boat like a hermit, but only some people—and those reluctantly—remember him another way, before he fished for a living. I didn't know him then; that part was told to me. The Maynard Gant I knew barely got by netting mullet and running trotlines for catfish, and for several years in the late nineteen-fifties his "shackboat," as some called his houseboat, was a familiar sight on the river. It really wasn't much more than a tin-roofed shack nailed to a raft, powered by a pair of forty-horse outboards that feebly pushed it upriver, towing a ten-foot johnboat. Gant was a big man of fifty-odd years, whose rope-veined arms, huge hands and heavy shoulders gave an impression of undiminished strength. I got the feeling that people were afraid of him, though not for anything he'd done; rather, it was something he hadn't done, something in the past, which made him seem to them like a loaded gun that had been cocked and then allowed to rust. They told me what they knew. The rest of it, which culminated during the flood of 1959, I heard from Gant himself.

In 1957, the year before I met Gant, I bought a cottage on the Suwannee River near Hart Springs. One day I was sitting on my new neighbor's porch having a get-acquainted drink with him and watching the sun set behind the trees across the river, when he pointed to a small houseboat chugging upstream with nerve-wracking slowness. He told me its skipper was a pretty good old boy, if a bit peculiar, known for his standoffishness and heavy drinking. He went ashore as seldom as possible—to sell his catch, buy supplies and fill his ice chest with cheap beer, which he drank "morning, noon and night."

"At least he don't start lookin' for victims after six beers," my informant went on in a conciliatory tone. "People appreciate that in drunks his size." He agreed that the man had had a rough time of it, "but a lot of that was his own damn fault." I was expected to ask what kind of rough time he'd had, and did. This is what he told me:

Maynard Gant came to the river in the spring of 1949, bringing with him a tall, light-skinned, and by all accounts exceptionally beautiful black woman, apparently his common-law wife, and bought five riverfront acres on an isolated stretch between Rock Bluff and Hart Springs. Together they built a cypress-log cabin, erecting it on fifteen-foot stilts to compensate for the floods that periodically transform the Suwannee into a drowned forest with a river inside it. They placed stone steps in the bank that led down to a solidly-built little dock between two cypress trees, and put up a strong gate at the entrance of the dense woods that covered their property. He got a job in a sawmill and the woman, whose name was Evelyn, stayed at home to work on the house, plant a garden, and fish from the dock. They were both about forty then, childless and travel-weary; in the South of those years, they'd found it necessary to move often. To settle in a rural county peopled mostly by poor whites, even in that remote forest, was an act of reckless optimism. But it was the river they'd chosen, not the people, and they were determined this time, whatever happened, to stay.

The trouble came soon enough. It began with insults shouted from passing cars, hostile treatment in stores (even though they'd learned through bitter experience to shop separately), and mumbled comments from co-workers at the sawmill. No one was willing to confront Gant directly; there was something fatalistic in his eyes, resigned to violence, and even the biggest man was deterred by the thought of those ape-like hands around his throat. Next came anonymous threats and warnings to leave the county, first by mail and then painted across his windshield, followed by a series of letters in a childish scrawl addressed to Evelyn, in which lust and hate were hopelessly tangled. One night they were roused from their bed by the sound of gunfire, and saw a spectral cross burning at the edge of the clearing. Gant took the letters to the county sheriff and told him about the cross-burning. He seemed unconcerned, smiling tolerantly at the suggestion that the Klan might be involved and assuring him that the few troublemakers behind it would soon get bored and drop it. Two months passed without incident, and they began to think the sheriff was right. Then, on a sweltering night in July, a boatload of drunken men pulled up to their dock, threw a rope around the piling and began calling Evelyn's name with obscene familiarity, inviting her to come down and get what they knew she wanted. One of them, egged on by his friends, began to climb onto the dock. A flashlight blinded him; Gant's tall figure appeared, framed by the twin cypresses, and in his hand was a heavy pistol. He shined the light over the boat, finding more than one familiar face, and told them that the first man to step foot on his property

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would die. Someone loosened the rope and the boat drifted; a voice choked with rage promised him they'd be back, and as if to punctuate the threat, the motor roared into life and the boat made a wide arc upstream. He listened to the fading sound, and then a familiar footfall creaked the dockboards and he felt her hand on his shoulder. Taking her hand, he placed the gun in it and told her to keep it near her when he was away. She agreed without a word.

Five days later Gant left the mill at midnight after working a double shift. The ten-mile drive back to the river was over desolate county roads in poor repair, lined at first with fenced pastures and then winding through the darker region of the bottomland, where black walls of trees seemed poised to close over the narrow strip of asphalt. Lightning veined the eastern sky, but his attention was drawn to a taillight blinking in the road ahead. It was a pickup truck, sprawled diagonally across the road, its door open, the driver slumped over the wheel. He stopped and sat there peering at the driver, who had not moved under the scrutiny of his headlights. Taking the ax handle he kept under the seat, he got out and approached the truck, calling out to the driver. There was no response so he moved closer, looking for signs of injury. As he leaned forward a voice behind him said, "Hey nigger-lover," and before he could turn around he was struck hard above the ear and lost consciousness.

He came to in a muddy ditch, a few feet from his truck. It had been driven off the road and sunk to the axles in mud. Nauseous, dizzy, his ears ringing, he staggered onto the road. It was three miles to his gate and he was just able to stay on his feet. He concentrated on keeping the center line in focus, telling himself over and over that she had the gun and knew how to use it. He watched for headlights that never came. It was a lonely stretch of road at any hour, but now its emptiness fed his fears. The million voices of crickets and frogs seemed to jeer at him, as if the whole countryside were involved in the conspiracy. He was still half a mile away when he saw the glow behind the trees and the rising smoke. He ran, vertiginously, and well before he reached his gate he knew his house was burning. As he stumbled into the clearing the stilts collapsed and the flaming cabin crashed to the ground, sending up an angry cloud of sparks.

Some time later, when the sheriff and the volunteer fire truck finally arrived, the cabin had been reduced to a smouldering pile of embers. The forest had been saved by the thunderstorm that was only now beginning to slacken. They found Gant stumbling through thickets, bellowing Evelyn's name, his head bloody, hands burned and lacerated by thorns. He was unresponsive to questions and an attempt to get him into a car bound for the hospital turned into a scuffle.

Her body was never found, though the wreckage of the cabin was sifted through, the woods searched, the river dragged. Not a single arrest was made. When Gant recovered from his concussion, he collected the insurance money from the fire, climbed into his sole remaining possession—his truck—and left. Where he came from and where he went nobody knew. It was the event more than the man that people remembered; he had stayed a stranger. Evelyn herself was hardly more than a cipher, less a memory than a fate. A funeral could have been the occasion for a show of public support, but her martyrdom was attenuated by her disappearance and by the fact that she too was a stranger. Added to this was the ugly truth that her flaunting of a taboo mitigated in some minds the infamy of the crime. For these and other reasons, perhaps concerning the identity of the perpetrators (though I'm speculating here), no such outcry was ever raised. And so it had remained for six years, an uneasy dream in the collective sleep, until 1955, when Gant showed up again, this time as a river-bound recluse; merely an oddity to some, but an unwanted reminder and a rebuke to others.

If anyone was expecting an avenger, however, they were to be disappointed, or in some cases, relieved. Gant was a now a commercial fisherman, apparently interested only in his daily yield, the vagaries of the weather, and the next beer. Catfish bite better at night, so he developed a routine of baiting his lines at dusk, checking them once at midnight and again in the morning, then making his way slowly downriver from one favored hole to the next over the course of a few days, selling his catch as he went, until he reached the Gulf. There he would net mullet for a day or two, head back upriver to Fanning Springs, sell his catch and go north to Branford, to begin the process over again. It was his practice when spending the night on a given stretch of the river to moor his boat at the docks of people who used their cottages as weekend retreats or were rarely home, and he always paid for the privilege with gifts of fresh fish. He even used what was left of his own dock; he'd continued to pay the property taxes on his land, and had built a scrapboard hut in the clearing where his cabin had been, though he only used it for storage. In every kind of weather he slept on his boat. For anyone who knew about Gant it was a little unsettling to see him moored to that remnant of another life, sprawled in his chair drinking his umpteenth beer of the day while darkness burgeoned in the trees above him.

In the summer of '58 I was working as a geological consultant for a phosphate company in Polk County, and was gone most of the time. It was after one on a Friday morning in late August when I arrived at the cabin after a two-month absence, bringing with me a load of field data from a new mine near Bartow, intending to spend the next week or so color-mapping

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deposits. Too restive to sleep after the four-hour drive, I poured a whisky and headed down to the dock. To my surprise, there was a boat tied up to it. I'd seen Gant's houseboat several times from a distance and recognized it right away, with its little johnboat trailing behind, its tin roof and tattered awning over the door. But I hadn't seen the man, and now that it appeared imminent I felt uncomfortable, less at my own curiosity than from a belated sense of indecency—that a stranger's misery had been passed to me as idle gossip. In a small window on the starboard side a cigarette glowed, then a cloud of smoke blew through the screen and a deep voice said, "You caught me." He came out, dipping his head under the awning and stepped to the railing.

"Caught you?" I asked, coming forward. It was a black night, but he took frequent drags on his cigarette, revealing the hollows of a hard, deeply-lined face and a patchy gray stubble.

"Usin' your dock," he said. His speech was a little slurred; I noticed a can of beer, almost hidden in his hand.

"I don't mind," I said. "Glad somebody's using it." He waited until I made a gesture of invitation and then stepped up to meet me. The stories hadn't exaggerated; he was six-four or -five, and big-framed, especially in the shoulders. I found myself deferring, against my will, to the primal authority of size.

"Maynard Gant," he said, extending his hand. I shifted my drink to my other hand and grasped it, fumbling for an awkward moment to get my hand around it. His index finger was as thick as my thumb.

"Walter Henninger," I said. "I've seen your boat before."

"Ain't much, is it?" he asked without expression.

"Long as it doesn't leak," I replied, already surprised to have had so many words with the "recluse." His hat was pulled low over his eyes, and he kept his face at an angle as he talked, repeatedly glancing over his shoulder at his boat, as if he had some urgent business aboard.

"Yeah, well... it's mine." He was silent for a moment, then said abruptly: "Look, if it's any bother, I'll move on." I assured him he was free to use the dock anytime. He nodded quickly. "'Preciate that. I like to work that hole over there." He waved a big arm toward the dark expanse behind him. "Had some luck tonight. Could you use a coupla catfish?"

"Sure." He stepped aboard his boat, pulled two good-sized bullheads out of a bucket and laid them on his cleaning table. Lighting a Coleman lantern on a hook beside the door, he began gutting and skinning with swift, expert strokes. I sat drinking and listening to the soft slip of the current under my feet, the hissing lantern, mullet jumping in the river. From the trees behind me came the barking call of a barred owl. Gant raised his head, listening, and for a moment I saw his face lit by the flames of a burning cabin.

"That owl knows I got mice onboard but he's too chicken to try for one. He'll get up the nerve one of these days." Wrapping the fish in a newspaper, he stepped over and handed them up to me.

I took them with my left hand, and when I saw him staring at the missing finger, I said, "Cherry bomb. It's what kept me out of the war. Couldn't serve my country without a trigger finger."

"I didn't ask," he said with a slow smile, then took half his beer at a gulp. Taking a chance, I pointed to the jagged scar undulating with the movement of his Adam's apple. "You get that in the war?" He stopped swallowing; the can came down slowly as the bloodshot gray eyes shifted to regard me, and for the first time I really saw him. His face seemed older than his body, its scarred and dessicated flesh stretched tight over the avid mask of bone. Papery folds of skin sagged under the unblinking eyes, and his broken nose was reddened by drink and too much sun. I thought for a second I'd overstepped, then his face relaxed and he shook his head. "Guess it was kind of a war," he said. He took hold of a rope dangling over the railing and pulled up a pail of water. Scooping the heads and entrails into another bucket, he poured the water over the cleaning table and then dropped it back into the water. Wiping his hands on a cloth, he walked over and sat down in a lawn chair, drew a bag of tobacco out of his pocket and began rolling a cigarette. Without looking up he said, "Fella and I wanted the same woman. We traded even: he cut my throat and I saved him the grief o' gettin' old."

Thinking of Evelyn, I said, "Must have been some woman."

He lit the cigarette, squinting through the smoke. "Ain't always the ones worth havin' that're got over somebody's dead body." The owl called again, a single booming note, closer this time. His eyes seemed to search for it, then he looked down at his beer, gulped down the rest of it and tossed the can into a fifty-gallon drum, where it clattered among others. Pulling a fresh beer from an ice chest beside the chair, he tipped his head back and drank. I was getting used to seeing him put down half a can at once. "Ever do any time?" he asked after a silence.

"Not really," I admitted. "A night in jail for drunk driving once."

"Try five years in a convict camp. That's what I got for breakin' that boy's neck. It was self-defense, but I'da gotten ten if he hadn't been an Indian. Nineteen twenty-four. Place called Gum Slough, not more'n fifty miles from here. Turpentine camp's what it was. I never worked harder for nothin' in my life. The Captain

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was a man named Jonnaker. He liked his convicts to cut ninety boxes a day. To do that many you had to start at dawn and keep driftin' through the pines 'til dark. By then you were covered with resin, bug-bit, scratched up and dead on your feet. Couldn't even close your hands from chipping and cornering all day. We slept in a long barracks side by side, ankles chained. No screens on the windows, so we had mosquitoes at night and horseflies and ticks by day. Some was worked to death, one went crazy and died, two got it from rattlesnakes and more'n a couple got shot trying to escape. Some of their names are still kickin' around in my head: Press Ambrose, T. J. Leverett, John Key West, Noble Hawkins. Like to died myself, but I didn't 'cause I was nineteen and the woman I'd killed for said she'd wait for me." He gazed raptly at the long ash gathering on his cigarette, then tapped it off, sucked the ember flush against his fingers and flipped it overboard.

"Did she?" I asked.

"No." A brief smile showed crooked yellow teeth. "But John Key West had a sister. Used to come one Sunday a month and bring him fried chicken and biscuits. She was about eighteen then, and hands-down the prettiest thing I ever saw, black or white. Tall, both of 'em, and light-brown, with those gold eyes you don't see anywhere except on island coloreds. They mighta come from Key West like he said but more likely farther south—Jamaica or St. Croix. Long after I'd given up on my own girl I was looking forward to those Sundays. And she saw me too. After awhile she started bringin' chicken enough for both of us. John had about a year to go when he lit out one night with this mean sonuvabitch named Columbus See, who was doin' life for a killing. They made it to the Suwannee near Live Oak and tried to swim across. See made it, John didn't. Well, I was sorry about that, but a whole lot sorrier that his sister quit comin'. That's what got me through my last year, thinkin' about her and how I was gonna find her when I got out. You can see prison hadn't taught me much—still bettin' my wad on one woman. When I got out and started asking around I found out she'd gotten married and moved to Jacksonville. Well that was a kick in the gut. But I still couldn't get her off my mind; so I worked at odd jobs for a couple months to earn train fare, then went to Jacksonville and looked her up. Whatever was between us was still there, 'cause she left her husband quick and didn't look back. That woman stuck, mister, stuck with me through every kinda weather..." He'd been looking at his hands, turning them over and back, as if newly amazed at their size, but when he stopped talking he turned his head and stared upstream, toward his abandoned five acres.

"What was her name?" I asked.

He exhaled resignedly. "Evelyn. Her husband wouldn't give her a divorce, so she went by her maiden name: Evelyn West. For twenty years we was married every way but legally." He finished his beer and stood up. "And I've talked too much. Turtles probably chewed all my bait off by now."

I got up too, thanked him for the fish and we said good night. I fell asleep almost immediately, but sometime in the night the owl called again from the big oak near my window and woke me up. Listening in the silence, I seemed to hear Gant's voice, and then a clattering can. When does he sleep? I wondered, before drifting off again. The next morning his boat was gone. I saw it two or three times from a distance over the next few months, but didn't speak to him again until the following spring, in the middle of the worst flood in eleven years.

After three months of unusually heavy rains the floodwaters crested in April, 1959, and half a mile of the limerock road to my place was under eight to ten feet of fast-moving water. It was late afternoon when I put my boat in at the hill above the floodplain, intending to spend the night at the cottage, then remove anything of value and lock it up against river-going looters. There'd been a cold, steady rain since morning, and with every gust of wind, heavy drops from the wet branches splashed into the water, adding to the thicket of noises: basso croaks, rhythmic burps and wet popping sounds, the piercing drone of cicadas and the raucous derision of crows. I paddled out of the stagnant shallows laden with wriggling masses of black tadpoles, and started the outboard. Rising up on both sides of the straight swath of water was a flooded forest of oak, cypress, red birch and pine. The water was cold, the color of weak coffee. I wanted to get there before sundown because all the usual bearings were under water and nothing is easier than getting lost during a flood, especially after dark. I saw a sign tacked to a tree about three inches above the waterline: "One shady acre for sale. Will talk terms." What was there to talk about now, with catfish and sturgeon foraging among the roots of the shade trees? A willow branch slapped me across the glasses, and by the time I dried them the boat was out of the trees and on the main river. The wind, blowing harder across the swollen expanse of water, lashed my face with rain. I headed slowly upstream, murky waves slapping the bow, while branches, beer cans, and worm boxes swept past in islets of dirty foam. I saw the cottage and made for it, noting with relief that the water level stood about two feet below the foundation. I saw something else too, as I tied up to the front step: Maynard Gant's houseboat, moored to a cypress not more than a hundred feet upriver.

I kept looking out my window while unpacking the food I'd brought, trying to see him. He had to be onboard because the johnboat was there, waving like a tail in the stiff current. "Fishing less and drinking

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more" was what my neighbor had said about him two weeks before. True, the fishing went to hell during a flood, but was that the reason he was drinking more? Maybe he was just passed out, or maybe he'd fallen overboard and drowned. While preparing dinner, I thought about taking the boat over and checking on him, but night was coming on fast and the darker it got the less attractive the prospect seemed. The last thing Maynard Gant wanted was somebody minding his business for him. So I stayed put, trying to read by the light of a kerosene lamp while rain drummed on the tin roof and the cottage shuddered against the massive pull of the river.

Around 10:30 I was startled by a loud bump outside, followed by footsteps on the stairs and a knock on the door. I looked out the window and saw Maynard Gant's face grotesquely illuminated by his flashlight. I opened the door and he dipped his head in a quick nod: "Mr. Henninger. Sorry to bother you at this hour." He was soaking wet.

"No bother at all, Mr. Gant," I answered, trying to conceal my surprise. "Come in."

He ducked under the low doorway and stood there uncertainly, giving off a strong body odor and a faint smell of fish. He looked ten years older than the last time I'd seen him, his cheeks fallen in, wet clothes clinging to his wasted frame. "How have you been?" I asked lamely, unnerved by the appalling change in his appearance.

"Up and down." he said, shivering. I handed him a towel and he took it with mumbled thanks. "Reason I came by..." He hesitated, then went on reluctantly. "Well, I was wonderin' if you might have any liquor you could spare on a wet night."

Knowing what it must have cost him to ask a slight acquaintance for a drink, I said, "Funny you should mention that; I was about to have a glass of Scotch. Have a seat there at the table and I'll get the glasses." I poured us each four fingers and sat down opposite him. In the lamplight he looked sick and scared, his whiskers gone almost white, his bony face no longer rugged but skeletal. He gripped the glass with a shaky hand, took a quick gulp, and set it carefully down. At that moment, something—a log, probably—bumped against one of the stilts. His head jerked up, his eyes showing too much white. He fumbled for the tobacco pouch in his shirt pocket and with trembling fingers began to roll a cigarette.

"Ran outta beer a couple days ago," he said, addressing the table. "This damn current's too strong for my boat. Fish are all out in the woods now anyway, and my trotlines get tangled up in there. Juglines bring in enough to feed me and that's about it. So that's why I come over; hope you don't mind."

"Glad to have the company. It's a bad night," I said.

We drank in silence, he taking grimacing gulps to my sips, and when his glass was empty I refilled it. The rain came in waves, deafeningly loud and then waning to a steady drizzle. Some time after midnight—we were both drunk by then—Gant started to talk, and it seemed to me as I listened that he was eviscerating himself, that this as much as the need for a drink was why he'd crossed wild water in the dark.

He began with the events leading up to Evelyn's death in 1949, and the anguished blur that was the next six years—his aimless drift through a score of jobs in a dozen states, saving just enough to keep moving and drinking up the rest. I glimpsed a succession of barroom brawls, wasted weeks in small-town jails and one-night stands that only exacerbated a loss he couldn't endure sober. Over time the pain had subsided to a dull ache, and then to a memory of pain, but his drinking was by now habitual. He couldn't shake the idea that his own carelessness had caused the disaster. And then there was his flight from the county. Running had made sense at the time; even if he hadn't been injured, he couldn't have hunted them all down. And where would he have stopped killing? The whole county was in on it, either directly or in silent support of the bunch that did it. Only later, over many drunken nights, had he faced the real reason why he'd run: killing and being killed hadn't scared him as much as the thought of being sent back to prison. That was what he couldn't bear; no, not even to get justice for Evelyn. He had soaked the truth out of himself: he was a coward, and he hated himself for it.

In 1955 he began to drift back toward Florida and the land he still owned, though he couldn't bring himself to live there again. Then came the night in Cedar Key when his luck changed and he won a man's houseboat in a marathon poker game, leaving at dawn with the means to earn a living on the river that, of all the places he'd been, felt like home. His hatred had burned away, and in its place was a numbness that was almost contentment. Evelyn's murderers were part of the world from which he'd exiled himself. The river gave him everything he needed now: it fed him, bathed him, rocked him to sleep, and for the bad nights there was always beer. Then, not long after our conversation, a change had occurred. That was when he told me about the squatter.

Moored at his own dock on the last night of September, he was returning from his trotline with three fat bullheads flopping in the bottom of the boat, when he noticed a light in the window of his storage shack. Once he'd pulled his boat into the shadow of the high riverbank the shack was out of sight, but as he came aboard and put the fish in the ice chest, he kept wondering who might be up there. There was a time when the thought of a trespasser would have enraged him, when

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he would have grabbed his knife and flashlight and charged up the bank to drive them away. Now he was merely curious; he knew what the shack contained: a few quarts of motor oil, some tools and tackle—nothing he couldn't afford to lose. The night was cool and a light breeze kept the mosquitoes away, so he sat out on deck, smoking and listening for suspicious noises. He heard nothing beyond the familiar riot of frogs and crickets, and after an hour or so went to bed. He slept poorly, waking often and feeling for the sheath knife under his pillow, but the night passed without incident.

In the morning he checked his lines, took them on board and made ready to leave. Then he climbed the mossy steps from the dock and approached the shack. The lock was broken off and the door ajar, but nothing had been taken. A tin can of water was sitting on a piece of crosswire fence between two bricks, bubbling over a can of sterno. In a corner swept clean of debris was a blanket laid over a bed of grass, and on the floor was a candle, a jar of instant coffee and a can of green peas. Thinking he must have frightened the person away in the act of making a paltry breakfast, he returned to the boat. Then, on an impulse, he took two cleaned fish, walked back to the shack and laid them near the boiling water. He stood in the clearing and turned slowly around, scanning the forest on all sides, but there was no one in sight.

It was a week before he was back on that stretch of the river and almost as long since he'd thought about the shack and its shy occupant. As before, he baited and sank his lines, then prepared a meal of pork and beans, idly wondering if the smell of food might bring the squatter down to the dock, assuming he was still up there. The moon rose at last over the trees, almost fatiguing in its brilliance, and seemed to cast a spell of stillness over the forest. At midnight he went out to check his lines. When he returned he noticed something lying on the crossboards of the dock, and shined his flashlight on a freshly-skinned rabbit. He cast the light on the bank above him, finding no one, then picked up the carcass and put it in the ice chest. So the squatter was still in the shack, and he was being thanked for the fish left the week before. He appreciated the gesture, and though intrigued by the squatter's shyness he decided to respect it and make no more forays up to the shack. When he departed the next morning he left two items on the dock: a catfish and a can of mosquito repellant.

It was a rainy week, which improved the fishing to such a degree that he chose to forego the mullet and stick to trotlines, since catfish brought a better price. So it was in five days instead of the usual seven when he again tied his boat to the rickety dock. It was a humid, cloudy evening and the dank forest breathed fireflies and mosquitoes over the palpitant water. As he baited his lines, he saw the light in the window of the shack, and then heard the sound of a small motor chugging upstream. A voice hailed him; it was Seth Merchant, a bass fisherman he knew, on his way home with a good catch. They exchanged a few words and parted. When he looked back toward the shack the light was gone. Steering his boat in, he wondered for the first time if the squatter might be on the run from something.

At around ten o'clock a wind rose in the trees with an onrushing sound, like the approach of something vast and purposeful, and shortly afterward there began a hard rain. For fifteen minutes it poured, then stopped as suddenly as it had started. As if they'd fallen to earth in the droplets, the night was now alive with the ecstatic croaking of innumerable frogs. Gant came out on deck to drink a beer. He was rolling a cigarette when he heard a crack of twigs on the bank. Unsheathing his knife and placing it in his lap, he lit the cigarette, tracking with his ears what he couldn't see. The footsteps moved stealthily through the undergrowth and stopped near a big cypress whose knees rose like a conclave of thin, hooded men out of the sandy bank. There was a silence of several minutes, until Gant, growing impatient, said in a casual voice: "Good evening."

There was a startled movement in the brush, then silence. "You the one I should thank for the rabbit?" he asked. Far from being irritated by the ensuing silence, he felt the deepest curiosity, and was glad the squatter hadn't run away. "I made a stew out of it." he said, as if answering a question. "Tasted real good." He strained to see a face in the darkness, but whoever it was had hidden himself well. Resisting the temptation to shine his light up there, he said, "Rabbits don't snare easy, do they? You must of felt like you owed me somethin'... to go to all that trouble. Wasn't necessary though; the fish was meant as a gift." Such an odd feeling, talking into the dark and getting no response, but somehow he felt as if his words were not unwelcome. He was obscurely pleased by the reversal of roles; usually it was he whom people tried to draw into conversation. "You know what?" he said. "I got some fish in the chest right now, more'n I can use. Want some?" He puffed on his cigarette, wondering if the squatter was a deafmute, or simpleminded, or just too frightened to speak. "Tell you what," he went on, "I'll leave the fish on the dock when I go out to check my lines, and you can come down and get 'em while I'm gone. Okay?"

He then behaved as if no one were there; he turned on his radio and bustled about the shack, washing dishes and straightening things. At midnight he cleaned two fish, wrapped them in newspaper and placed them on the dock, then started the motor and steered his boat out into the river. Anchoring it near the snag to which he had tied the trotline, he had a good view of the dock, which was about eighty yards away. He was checking

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the third hook when he glanced toward the dock and saw a thin figure clad in a hat and a long flapping coat rise up as if from a hole in the dock and pass swiftly up the bank. It was only a glimpse from the back, but his heart pounded with excitement. Why had the squatter come to the riverbank and not run away when he'd spoken to him? Had hunger won out over fear, or was there another reason? He was aware of something else besides curiosity stirring in him—a desire to protect the squatter. Why should anyone else know about him? Whatever his story was, he would tell it in his own time.

When he came back he noted with satisfaction that the fish were gone, and after casting his light about the dock to make sure nothing had been left in their place, he went to bed. The squatter must have returned sometime in the night, however, for when he awoke the next morning he found three items arranged in a triangular pattern on the dock: a spool of thread, a tin can full of wild blackberries, and a long spoon whittled out of red birch. He would no longer try to dissuade the squatter from repaying him for his gifts, he decided. Instead, he would maintain the balance of obligation in his favor; maybe he would come to depend on him, and gradually, to trust him. When he left that morning and headed south there was a new gift on the dock: a bamboo fishing pole, rigged and ready to use.

Three nights later, during a terrific thunderstorm, a lightning bolt struck a pine tree across the river and set fire to its top. As he watched it burn he realized that he'd been thinking about the squatter and wondering if he was all right. It was the first time in ten years he had been interested enough in another person to worry about them. Nameless and faceless though he was, the squatter had managed, through the fascination of his shyness—which seemed more akin to that of animals than humans—to enter the bleak domain of his thoughts. He was "his" mystery, the inhabitant of a darkness deeper than his own, and as such the only one capable of drawing him out. In anticipation of their next encounter, he bought some mosquito netting and a few canned goods.

Thus for the next three months, at seven-day intervals, their odd relationship continued, its boundaries set by nightfall, the riverbank, and the squatter's silence. It could not be called one-sided, because the ritual exchange of gifts was scrupulously observed. Gant's presents tended toward the practical: canned food, soap, matches, a small towel, a coffee cup, boxes of earthworms, socks, candles. The squatter gave handmade articles and the meager bounty of the forest: small carvings of animals and curious compositions made from feathers, bones, and arrowheads, stuck together with pine resin and fishing line, wild berries, and the occasional squirrel or rabbit. Gant would go to his shack when he needed something, but only in the morning and always telegraphing his intentions by clumping loudly up the bank. His musty storage hut had become a neat and well-swept hovel, with a rag curtain over the single window, cans stacked in one corner and the mosquito net strung over the bed of straw. He liked the ordered simplicity of the tiny room, so different from the squalor of his houseboat. The squatter's self-reliance, not unlike his own, attracted him. He had hoped, if not expected, for him to grow bolder with familiarity, to at last step out of the shadows and identify himself, though he'd shown no such inclination so far. But if he was unwilling to be seen or heard, he was clearly disposed to listening, and as the weeks passed Gant found himself talking at greater length, delving deeper into the past. Speaking to a patient presence behind a tree was immeasurably more satisfying than talking to oneself, even if that person's unvarying response was to wait a decorous minute or two and then silently withdraw. What the squatter got out of it he couldn't say, but his curiosity was tempting him to find out.

Christmas, 1958, was one of those clear winter nights on the river when every living thing seemed to endure the cold in stunned silence, and even the water was undisturbed by leaping mullet. Gant sat bundled up in a blanket in his lawn chair, a little drunk, staring up at the arc of the Milky Way hanging like frozen smoke across the stars. At last he heard the sound he'd been waiting for all evening—the squatter's stealthy approach through the brush. When he stopped behind the tree, Gant said, "Merry Christmas." He spoke of the cold weather, a near collision with another boat, and then, hesitantly, about Evelyn. He knew he talked about her too much and worried about trying his listener's patience. After a few minutes he changed the subject. "I almost forgot," he said, getting up and lifting the bag beside his chair. "This is for you. Get it when you want." Setting it down on the dock, he wished the squatter goodnight and went to bed. Before falling asleep he wondered how he would react to the gifts he'd bought in Fanning Springs: a wool blanket, a package of cupcakes, and a hand mirror.

He was awakened after what seemed many hours by the dockboards creaking; he lay quietly, his eyes wide in the dark, listening to the soft footsteps approaching until they were almost under the starboard window, then stop. He heard the bag being opened, its contents laid out, and a long cooing sigh, like a bird out of breath. Easing himself out of the cot, he crept to the window, parted the curtains with a finger and peered down at the dock, well-lit by a late-rising moon. The squatter was crouched on the balls of his feet, the blanket spread over his head and shoulders, from which projected the brim of a straw hat pulled low over his face, so that even though he was facing the window, Gant could only see

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his hands. He watched them pick up the mirror, hesitating a moment before slowly lifting it toward his face. With pounding heart he watched the brim come up, and then he saw a face both monstrous and familiar grimace at its own reflection: he saw Evelyn. A sound was forced from him as if he'd been punched in the stomach, and she looked up and saw him. Her mouth, a lipless slash in the melted ruin of her face, opened in a shriek; she stood up, hurled the mirror at him and bounded up the riverbank, blanket flying like a cape behind her. He flinched back as the glass shattered against the window frame, stumbled into the table and fell heavily. For a long time he lay there, feeling weighted down, crushed by the sight of her face, which was rapidly devouring all other versions of itself in his memory, and lying like a stone in him now, pinning him to the floor. Trailing behind it in a diminishing series of shocks were all the things he'd said about her to the squatter over weeks and months, and behind that the ten wasted years shaped and justified by the axiom of her death. He was in shock; accepting her death had been too arduous for him easily to accept her alive again. But one question throbbed in his head: why had she not spoken? Was it shame, madness, or a form of punishment? He had to know, he told himself, getting up off the cold floor; she had to tell him.

As he climbed the riverbank, he had an eerie feeling of repetition, as if the years between the two nightmares of seeking her in a dark woods had been a jumbled dream. The shack was empty; he stood in the doorway, realizing only now that its neat austerity reminded him of the way she'd kept their cabin. Closing the door, he walked to the center of the moonlit clearing and called her name. He waited, shivering, then repeated it. He sat down in the dirt and waited for what could have been hours in the wet, numbing cold, repeating her name at intervals, sensing that she was in earshot and determined to wait her out.

"Don't turn around!" The voice behind him was a hissing rasp, not at all like he remembered it. Then in a whisper: "Please." He nodded, shaking as much from her unimagined presence as the cold. "I'm sorry," the voice went on in a softer tone. "I wanted too much. To be near you, to be dead to you... it couldn't last."

"Why?" It was the one word he could manage.

"You were dead. They told me you were dead. How could I not believe them?"

He realized with a shudder that she was back in the burning cabin.

"When they told me that, I didn't care anymore. It made them mad that I didn't care, so when they were finished one of them put me out of my misery with a rifle butt. I came to on fire. My legs moved me somehow; I jumped out the window, broke my foot. I rolled the fire out and felt the ribs they'd broken. Don't know how I made it to the dock, but I remember being underwater, fighting the current, then lying in the bottom of a boat, seeing the stars moving above me, and a dark face looking down. I remember rain and how I cried for more when it stopped. A colored fisherman had found me, holding on to a snag. He took me home, cared for me. Home was two acres and a shack in the Gulf Hammock, miles from anyplace. I wanted to die; I almost did. But the old man wouldn't let me. He even hid the mirrors while I healed, so it was a long time before I saw what the fire had done to my face. It took one trip to town with him to teach me how proud I was. All my life men had stared at me, wanted me; now they only wanted me out of their sight. So I went back with him and stayed there, never leaving for any reason. I cooked for him, cleaned, kept a garden, helped him raise his chickens. He was good to me. He died this year. I couldn't stay there anymore, and for a long time I'd been thinking of the river, this place, wondering if it was sold. One night I put on his hat and coat, took what food I could carry in the pockets, then walked and hitched back here, hiding my face as best I could. I broke into the shack, not knowing it was yours, and made a place to sleep. It felt like being home again, a place where I could be alone and no one could wish me someplace else. I dreamed about you often, and that was good, too. The dreams kept me company.

"And then the morning came when I saw you. It was like drowning: I couldn't breathe, couldn't speak. It changed everything. I saw what my death had done to you. I meant to tell you, a hundred times I opened my mouth to say your name, but... I couldn't. No, that's a lie. I didn't want to tell you."

"It's all right," he said, suddenly fearful. "It's all right."

"No it isn't. You never saw the selfishness, the awful pride in me. It was food to me to hear you talk, to watch your face when you remembered me. You still loved me, saw me in your mind the way I was. I wanted to be beautiful to someone, to be wanted, if only in your memory, not pitied or put up with. So I used you, and kept on using you, playing this crazy game, until it ended."

"You're still my wife," he said. "I still want you."

"Yes," said the voice sadly.

"Do you still want me?"

There was a pause before she whispered: "Yes."

"Then let me look at you."

"No!" she cried, and then she was up and running through the woods. He followed her. She had come to know the woods very well, much better than he did. As he ran blindly through the thickets, calling her name, the sense of being in a recurrent nightmare came over him again, stronger this time. More than once the chase became a search, but at last she took to the trail, her caped figure flying over the white sand, luminous in the moon-

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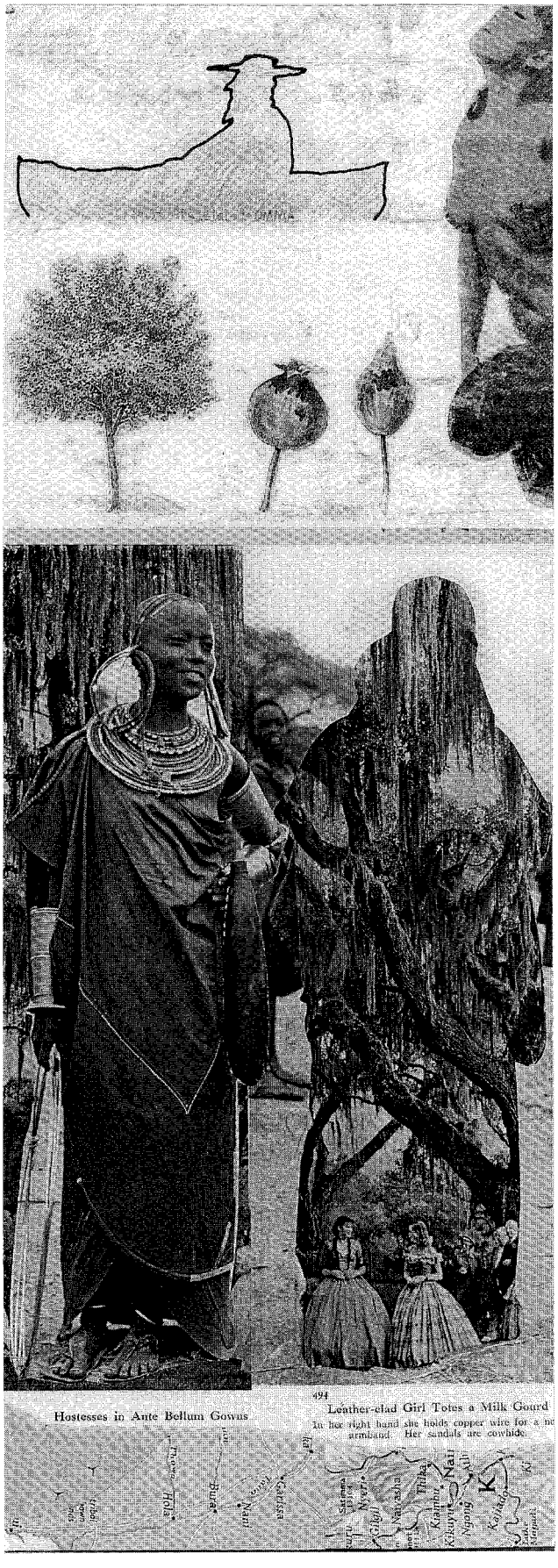
Hostesses in Ante Bellum Gowns
494
Leather-clad Girl Totes a Milk Gourd
In her right hand she holds copper wire for a ne
armband. Her sandals are cowhide.

WILLIAM FRANCIS BISBEE

light. Closing the distance, he caught her by the arm.

"Let me go!" she cried. Her other arm was shielding her face as he pleaded with her to come with him. He saw it go into her coat and come up holding what looked like the rusted barrel of a pistol. "Maynard!" she screamed, and brought it down hard on his wrist. He grunted in pain, lost his grip and she was gone. He stood in the road for a long time, staring at the blanket she'd left behind...

Gant splashed a little whisky in my glass and drank the dregs from the bottle. He brought the unlit cigarette to his lips and drew on it, staring confusedly at it for a moment before setting the bottle on the floor and fumbling for his matches. It tipped over and rolled across the floor; listening to it, I realized the rain had stopped.

"Did you see her again?" I asked.

He shook his head, eyes half closed. "Nothin' but rain, night after night just like this, rainin' like the end of the world. She must o' stayed in the hut for a while longer because the food I left for her was gone, but I never saw her after that night. Parked my boat there for days on end, getting drunk and not much else... thinkin' maybe when the the hut was flooded she'd come aboard, at least let me take her someplace dry. I waited there 'til the whole place was underwater. Don't know what happened to her. Wish to God I did." After a long silence, he pushed back his chair and rose unsteadily. "Better get on back now."

"You could sleep on the couch there," I said. "Might be better than trying the river."

"'Preciate it, Mr. Henninger, but I'll move on. Ain't but a hundred feet or so to the boat. Liquor's all gone anyway, right?"

I held his flashlight for him while he got in his boat and started the motor. The boat shot ahead, too fast for the conditions, and he said something drowned out by the motor. I shined my light after him, and saw his big hand waving in the beam. It was my last sight of him.

Two weeks later, a fisherman off the Fanning Springs bridge saw a houseboat at dawn drifting silently through the shreds of fog on the water. He watched it pass under the bridge and out of sight. Many hours later he told somebody and the police were notified. They found Gant's boat a few hundred yards downriver, hung up in the branches of a willow tree, the johnboat gone, tatters of awning snapping in the wind. In the branches of the tree, lining the railings, on the roof and inside the shack was a congregation of buzzards, resembling in their ragged plumage a disreputable band of professional mourners, crowding about the deck in greedy confusion. At the arrival of the police launch they flapped off in unruly haste, the first and last guests, albeit uninvited, to grace the long exile of Maynard Gant. □

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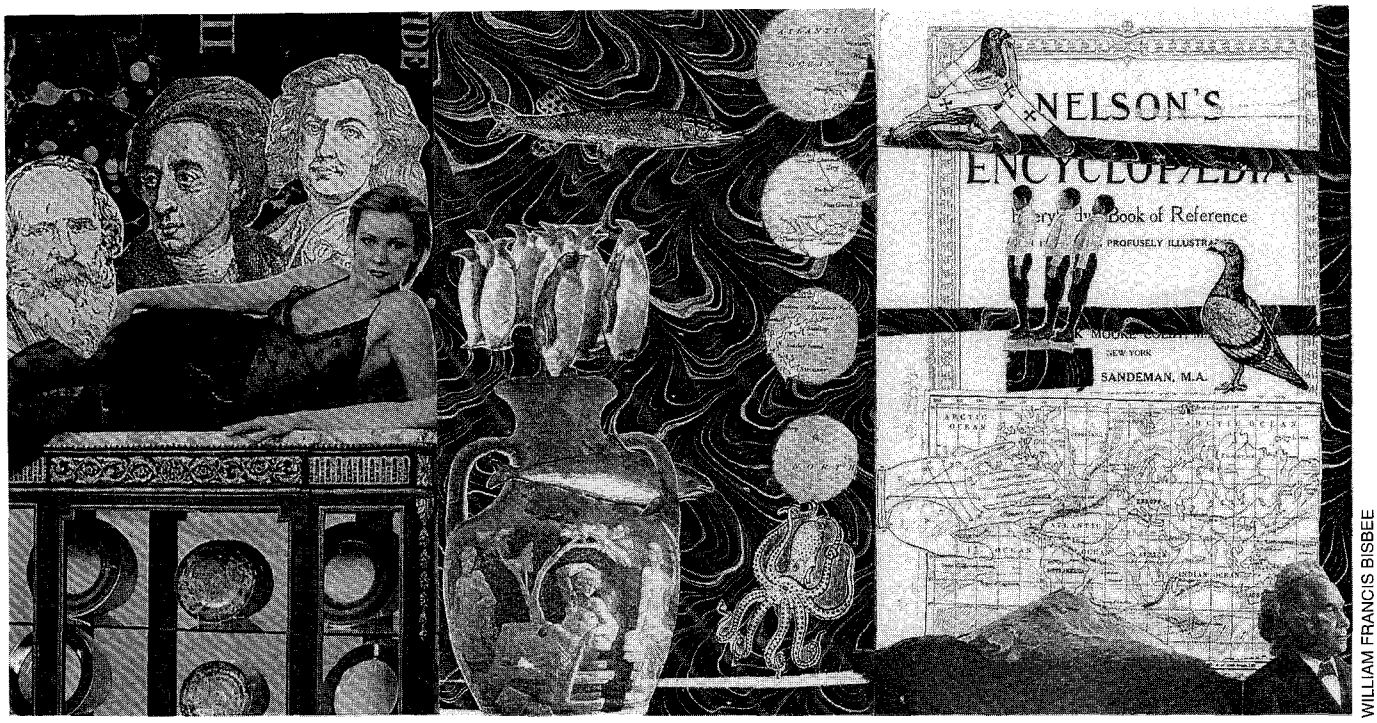

WILLIAM FRANCIS BISBEE

Cecilia Malm

Marriage

Karen was about to wash her face, as she did every morning, when she realized her engagement ring was gone. She stood with her thighs pressed against the sink, soapy water dripping from the tips of her elbows and stared at her spread fingers in disbelief. The 1.5 carat, emerald-cut diamond ring her boyfriend Carl had given her just two days ago was no longer on her hand. The open drain stared blankly back at her.

She had a strange floating sensation she had not experienced since high school, when a wild-eyed student burst into her chemistry class and announced that a boy she secretly wanted to date had just been hit by a car. She remembered seeing the boy's face in vivid detail for several seconds: his full lips and the blond hair he continually swept out of his fierce eyes.

She remembered knowing at that moment that they would have gone out with each other if he hadn't been killed, that he would have taken her for rides at night in his car with all the windows rolled down and they would have played Pink Floyd tapes and smoked cigarettes. She knew that they would have gone to the prom together—she in blue taffeta and he in a tux—and they would have made love on the gritty shag carpeting of the Day's Inn on Route 178 while the party pounded on in the room next door and their clothes wilted over the bed and the chairs.

After high school they would have gone to the local university to be near one another and would have moved in together into a big house on campus where the door always hung open and bicycles lay strewn like dead animals in the yard. She would have gotten pregnant before finishing her nursing degree; they would have had a girl instead of the boy they had hoped for, and he would have decided he wanted to become a writer instead of an engineer. They would have tried two more times and gotten two more girls with hair that was neither blond like his nor dark like hers, but sadly somewhere in between.

She would have hidden from him a picture cut long ago from the high school yearbook, a picture of him in his lacrosse uniform, hoisted up on broad shoulders, making the sign of a vee. She would have hidden the picture beneath her underwear and she would have fantasized about having an affair with a fireman, or perhaps a Jehovah's witness who once came to the door wearing a suit. And while she would have only imagined these affairs, he would have actually consummated one with a writing student at the community college who wore black eyeliner, a leotard and faded jeans that hugged her slim hips. And one day while washing the dishes she would have pulled her hands from greasy water and realized her wedding ring was no longer on her hand. □

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Amelie Walmsley

Billi Bi

Congratulations," Frieda says, "they've allowed me one phone call and you are it."

"Where are you?" I ask.

"Central lockup. They picked me up for shoplifting. Took them long enough," Frieda adds.

"How long ago were you arrested?" I say.

"Five, maybe six o'clock."

"And you're only getting around to calling me now?"

"These things take time," Frieda says.

"Christ, Frieda, what are you going to do?"

"I'm calling you," she says. "I'm relying on your common sense and higher intelligence to help me out. You're my one phone call, so don't blow it."

"You need a lawyer."

"Brilliant!" Frieda says. "I can see why Yale snapped you up."

I let this one pass. Frieda's spent all spring Yale-bashing, ever since my acceptance letter arrived with the blue insignia on it. Frieda's taking to calling me Ivy, short for Miss Ivy League. That's when she really feels mean.

"C'mon," Frieda says, "think of somebody to bail me out who won't tell the P's." The P's, our parents, are in Mexico. In Zihuateno, actually, in the middle of a jungle.

"—Not Uncle Bobby," Frieda says, "or Uncle Turk. How come all their lawyer friends are in cahoots?"

"What did you steal?" I ask.

Frieda giggles. Giggles. "Oh, this and that."

It must have been some day, knowing Frieda.

"Hurry up, think of *somebody*," Frieda says.

I try. I keep coming up blank, as if the whole landscape of our lives had suddenly gone white and vanished.

"I got it," Frieda says. "How about Carlos?"

Carlos de la Madrid is Mother's lover. Or was, although as things go, what difference does it make? Carlos is a pilot for Iberia. He lives out in Timberlane, a woodsy nouveau-rich subdivision, with his new wife and their baby daughter.

"I don't believe you," I say. "Carlos?"

"*Perfecto*," Frieda says.

Carlos sounds unhappy to hear my voice. I'm sure being hauled out of bed in the middle of the night to post bond for Frieda isn't his idea of paradise. What is? Carlos runs a seafood restaurant when he isn't flying planes. His wife, Carmen, is in the hotel business. Carlos has more in his life than anybody I can think of: his job with Iberia, a seafood place, a new house in the boonies, new wife, new baby. All Frieda has right now is me and Carlos.

He picks me up in a new Mercedes. The baby, Isabella, is asleep in the carseat in back. "Carmen's gone to Atlanta," Carlos explains, "so I had to bring her. It's not nice, bringing a baby to jail."

"Thanks, Carlos."

"Don't thank me. I'm very unhappy about this. The whole city of New Orleans you have, and you pick me to call."

Carlos is wearing soft old jeans, espadrilles, and a beautiful, freshly ironed guyabera. There's a spot of bright yellow on his shirt. On the way downtown, Carlos gripes.

"I was making Billi Bi last night for the restaurant. A soup must be magnificent, without flaw. There was something terribly wrong with this one. I had to throw it all away. I was just about to start over when you called me. We begin our new menu tomorrow night with no Billi Bi."

"Sorry," I say.

"Your sister. She crazy or what?" Carlos asks.

"Frieda's Frieda."

Carlos looks over at me; his good looks momentarily show through anger. "Crazy," he says, "your mother tells me."

I'm wondering about Billi Bi, whether it's made with mussels or clams. I had it once at a small bistro in New Haven when I went for my interview at Yale. It was raining and I didn't want to arrive wet, but since I was an hour early for the interview I ducked in this restaurant. I ordered the cheapest thing on the menu, the soup. It arrived, hot, velvety, made with clams, I think. In Mexico my parents went on a fishing trip and one of the divers went down and brought up huge, bright orange clams for lunch. They steamed them opened and washed them down with Chardonnay. Here, I'm thinking about all this when I should be thinking about Frieda.

Carlos parks, unstraps the sleeping Isabella's carseat, and carries it with her still asleep inside the police station. I follow, a half-pace behind.

Inside he hands me Isabella, motions me to wait. I park the sleeping baby on the floor and take up a molded plastic seat. Carlos speaks to the officer behind the desk. The officer takes him behind a door. It occurs to me how funny it is for Frieda to have chosen Carlos. But then, if anybody can spring Frieda, he can.

I fall asleep waiting. When I wake up, Isabella is wide awake, staring at me.

"Hi there," I say. I'm not sure whether to leave her in the carseat or take her out. Not sure what her connection is to me, although it seems like there is one. Her ears are pierced with tiny pearls.

Then Frieda bursts through the door, waving.

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"About time," she says, tugging on me, obviously delighted to see me, to have made this scene.

"I think they were getting reading to release me on my own recognizance," Frieda says. "Whatever that means. 'I recognize myself, therefore you can let me go free'?"

"But you're okay?" I ask.

"Jesus, that place is disgusting. No privacy. Pubic hairs on the cake of soap. What's the Spanish word for pubic hair, Carlos?" Frieda asks.

Carlos looks serious. "Next time may not be like this," he says, "next time you won't get off so light."

"You either," Frieda says.

"*Pendejo*," I say, suddenly remembering the word.

Frieda's wearing this enormous alligator bag, not too perfect for shoplifting because too conspicuous, too Frieda. She opens the bag and takes out a gold Dunhill cigarette lighter. Brand-new. "Carlos," she says, "a present."

"No, thank you," Carlos says.

"For your trouble," Frieda says.

"No. My trouble is almost over. Yours is probably just beginning."

"Okay," Frieda says, "pass up a perfectly good lighter. Eighteen carat gold."

"If I can't be sure of the origin of things I don't take them," Carlos says.

Frieda smiles, looks Carlos in the eye. "Surely," she says, "not always."

Mussels, now I remember it's mussels. Mussels in rich creamy soup with a hint of saffron. The spot of yellow on Carlos' shirt. When I go to New Haven I'm going to find that bistro, taste that soup again. My whole life is going to change, maybe.

"Here." Frieda presses the cigarette lighter into my hand. "You take it, Ivy. You aren't so particular about the origin of things, are you?"

"No, I'm not."

Now it's morning, the silver blue of Carlos' Mercedes. He opens the door to let us in but nobody moves. The four of us wait in front of the police station. Carlos and Isabella, Frieda and me. Just like that. □

Dallas Wiebe

Fairy Faucets

In most hotels and motels the bathrooms are built back to back. The bathroom you use is repeated in the bathroom your neighbor uses. Bathrooms are built this way so that they can share plumbing. One set of pipes serves two rooms. This pattern is repeated throughout the hotel and the patterns are all tied together by the pipes that form a plastered-in lute that hums with the emotional states of the users of those watery systems.

I've been thinking a lot recently about how we communicate through the walls around us. I've been thinking about it because I've had a lot of time to think. I wonder how much of my hotel bill will be for the water I used in my thirty days here at the Henley Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. I wonder if the water I used got through to the other side. I wonder if Mary will come to the door when I finally leave this room. I wonder what the manager will say when I tell him that I can't pay my bill.

When I first came here I planned to stay just one night. I could afford that. When I retired from the ministry last year at the age of seventy, my long-suffering congregation gave me a $300 going-away present. I decided to use the money to see Washington, D.C., and then spend the rest off my life in a God-given poverty. I came and I registered here. My plans changed when I listened to the clucking of pipes and the swishing of water and realized that the person in the bathroom that is twin to mine was a woman. I've known for a long time that you can tell by fluid flow who's using a bathroom. You don't have to peek in or make a film of it. It's no secret that when women turn on a faucet they let the water run full blast, even if they're just wetting the end of a Q-Tip or washing under their eyelids. Men are much more fastidious about faucet flow. When they wash a hunk of ear wax off the end of a little finger they use just enough water to flush the wax away. They know you don't have to drown it; you just want it to go down the drain. When men brush their teeth they turn the water off and on as needed. Women turn the faucet on full volume as if that would wash away their plaque or stop their gums from bleeding.

My neighbor lady fascinated me so much that I decided to stay in my room a second night even though the room cost $195 per night, for which you get your bedspread turned down in the afternoon and a chocolate wafer on the pillow. That second night I listened to messages that roared in her sink and trickled into mine. I listened to hear if there was some code that could be deciphered, some code that was saying something to all those hotel guests whose bathrooms were hooked into the same communications network. I listened to see if she was calling to me. I listened to volume, interval and pitch. I listened for tub, shower, sink and toilet to see if there was meaning in that brass serenade as it passed through the male and female joints. I got no sleep and my legs got cramped as I sat on the tile floor all night and wondered what she was dreaming.

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On the third night my aural spying paid off. I heard what I thought was Morse code. Three mammoth turn ons with a glissando turn off at the end. It probably was toilet, bathtub, sink, and then a little glass of water. I was ecstatic. It was like hearing the first words from a child. It was like falling into a well and hearing a voice from above saying it's dry. It was like the beginning of a close encounter of a threaded and jointed kind. I trembled in my plumbing induced emotion. I could hear the message flowing past the nipples on the pipes and the elbow joints in the floor. I got down on my knees on that tiled floor and said a little prayer for all the plumbers of the world who hook us into one another's deepest feelings.

After the sixth night of listening my bedspread was covered with notes and I knew that what was performed by Mary LaMer was not code. It was not semantic. It was not onomatopoeia. It was not sign language. It was not gestures of nothingness. I threw my notes away. I went to the tile floor and waited because the obvious solution had occurred to me. It was there all along; I just didn't hear it. At 3:00 A.M. I heard the opening bars of "Lightly Row" played on the two Afton faucets of her sink and I knew at once that the reason I loved Mary so much was that she was trying to show her passion in the way great lovers have always done it, that is, through music. She was leading me into our relationship by beginning with the simplest declaration that she could think of and which she could play on her pipes.

By my ninth night I thought that I had mastered "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" on the sink. I had it worked out so that the hot faucet played a pianissimo drone and the cold faucet played the melody mezzo forte. I didn't worry about getting in the words of the song. They're wonderful in their own way, but they can't get past the rusted joints of the pipes and the open shutoff valves. At 9:00 P.M. I went into my bathroom, knelt by my Afton sink, rested my chin on the cool front edge, raised my left hand to the hot handle and my right to the cold. And waited until 4:00 A.M. when I heard the fanfare of toilet, tub and sink, followed by a coda of spurts. In the silence that followed I turned on the hot drone. Oh how it hummed right on pitch and so perfectly softly. After two measures of the droning and with the pipes humming along I let the melody flow gently down the drain. A dreamy silence of four days followed my serenade.

I continued to practice in order to extend my repertoire. On the thirteenth night, after Mary's fanfare, I played to show my depth of feeling. I played for her a hymn. It begins, "By cool Siloam's shady rill/How fair the lily grows!" I put all my tenderness into the rendition. I hummed along with the pipes. The next night I played the "Navy Hymn" and on the next "Shall We Gather at the River." Followed by seven days of sleepy silence. As if someone hadn't paid the water bill or as if the water meters had been lulled to sleep by my liquid lullabies.

On the twenty-third night I tried "Old Man River" and "Down By The Old Millstream." I put everything I had into the renditions. I poured out long sustained notes on "rolling" and "along," on "you," "blue" and "queen" and "sixteen." Perhaps she was asleep by the murmuring drains and I was disturbing her damp dreams.

On the twenty-fourth night at 3:00 A.M. I arose from my bleeding knees and lay down in bed. While my blood soaked into the bedspread I listened to the little liquor and snack refrigerator by my bed go on and off and thought of projects to wash away the silence. I thought of dormitory latrines. I thought of public lavatories. Then I thought of bus depots, railroad stations and airports where there are banks of sinks and all with two faucets. With all those instruments manufactured by Moen, Kohler, American Standard, Afton and Pfister you could play Smetana's "The Moldau," Strauss's "Blue Danube Waltz," Debussy's "La Mer," Handel's "Water Music." You could have a whole symphony orchestra. You could play symphonies, oratorios, cantatas, serenades, suites, chamber music. You could hire extra musicians and write out scores for the performances. You could have basses in the stalls, tenors on the pissoirs and altos and sopranos on the spigots. Not to mention all those lovely, dreaming women on the other side of the wall, washed away by the H_2O of my music. I couldn't afford all that just as I can't afford this room. I haven't even got a credit card.

I was drowning in despair until I remembered those airport washrooms where the faucets have no handles and you just stand in front of them and they turn on. That's something I can do when I get out of jail. I'll go into one of those washrooms and dance in front of the sinks. I'll leap from sink to sink until I have them all running. Then as they turn off I'll selectively get them going and play duets, trios, quartets, sextets, octets, depending on the size of the airport and the speed with which the security officers arrive.

It is now my thirtieth day in this room and I must leave. The manager wants me to pay my bill. My knees have stopped bleeding. I haven't practiced in a week. I'll pack my sodden clothes, turn down the bedspread and go out in the hall and stand before Mary LaMer's door. I'll wait for her to come out so that we can meet at least once before I leave. I'll speak to her and introduce myself, give her a chocolate wafer. Then I'll go down and face the music at the check-out desk. I'll go happy because I know that Mary will come into the hall to see me, because last night, at 5:00 A.M., I heard her fanfare and then she played, on her faucets, oh so sweetly and softly:

"Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes;
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream."

□

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D.E. Steward
Maio

Through all time fewer than one percent of us could read and write

And until printing virtually all knowledge was memory

Learning the epistemologies and patterns of knowledge, accessing the networks in technopatois, is more important now than learning the facts

Especially since now much to which we are trained is obsolete by the time we put it to any test

And with video, CD-ROM and Internet perhaps full-power language is being relegated to an arcane skill

Disconnectedness

Psychobabble

Cool

The way trying to talk to somebody in sunglasses is like a person taking your call on a speakerphone

Loneliness among the plenitude

Isolation within a plethora of print, networks, image and sound

Little authentic voice, much glib self-help promotion

We all have one hundred billion neurons with which to grow and gray is called *bleu passé*

Kanashimi, natsukashisa

Mono no aware

Cologne yellow is light chrome yellow

The Wall demolished in 1989, followed by communism's almost complete demise,

and then four and a half years later Mandela's election, three marvels

three Christian miracles, like three Aladdin wishes

Mandela's khoi-khoi on his election victory, perhaps the most miraculous thing in my time that could actually be

There on the furthest of Africa jutting isolate as if in geo-affirmation of

what is within the planetary scale. The emphatic personality of shapes

imposed on the oceanic southern universal

Great Southern Ocean boundlessly wide in its full latitudinal turns around and

around the globe within that ocean hemisphere's emptiness, water without end

Indian Ocean, South Atlantic meet and meld the seam, the Western Cape's high proud montane definition of the fine, temperate southern Africa Southern

Hemisphere that's the long past home for us all. Where all of us were born.

Sun, wind, open ocean coasts, fresh water fountaining, humans on the land inobtrusively and living singular as though hidden in the wind shadows of all

the slopes and kloofs, leopard country and baboons, and hidden spring surging

pools behind the rock slabs high up the deepest clefts, the reseda gray-green

greens of succulents and sage under the blue-green ocean serene dazzle

brilliant meridional sweeping sun

Up the Indian Ocean coast from the Western Cape to southernmost Mocambique it

seemed that to be on that line that sweeps Africa to the Equator and then to

the Somali Horn six thousand miles on from Natal's coast, the awareness that

there never need be anything else other than to be in that place, to remain

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with consciousness fixed unconditionally in the green magnificence of the bowl

of Port St. Johns at the mouth of the Umzimvubu River in Pondoland

Drove out to Port St. Johns' little harbor and gaped, but then turned away and

drove off hurriedly on up through Natal for refuge in Swaziland. That coast,

that place, Port St. Johns, even more than the Western Cape itself, profoundly

spectacular at the Fogo, Venice, Denali, Maui, Kyoto level, but unapproachable

then because there was Zululand and the Swazi border to cross to avoid being

arrested, interrogated and deported all the way to JFK, or would they have

expelled me to London, or maybe just Nairobi? No, later when they showed up

in the middle of the night with threats and hyperbole they said if they were

forgiving and only deported me it would be to New York, if they didn't try me

in Pretoria with the others when they captured them

The way they barged into the bedroom up in that empty house in Ezulwini

twenty-five kilometers inside Swaziland frightened me more than anything I've

seen them do

The Ezulwini papaya trees' naked trunks like cockerels' necks straining as

atavistic jungle chickens when they try to crow, and the rustle bounce branch

chattering of the monkeys in the trees up under the krans back behind the

house getting settled down at dusk. When I climbed above the place to the

highveld mountain sheer slope sheep pastures and from there looked down onto

the breadth of detail in which I lived in one glance it was staggering to

realize how grand and exclusively Swazi it was

Had been. Now so long in the past that what is left there has little to do

with what I knew. There is a golf course on the slope down to Ezulwini now.

The house itself razed and that site now a hotel for a gambling casino-spa

complex centered on the Ezulwini hot springs, and for all I know the

mysterious place below the krans where the monkeys came to spend the night now

may be a dumpster pad or parking lot

Only in the evening sometimes was there sense of others, smelled cooking fire

smoke rising high and white from the kraal a mile and a half away brown and

unobtrusive fitted in along the southern slope of the Ezulwini Valley. Kraal

dogs barking on and once in a while crossing paths with women walking the

hills collecting fire wood. Otherwise quiet and alone

Had been almost as quiet and alone in the Western Cape. The strand, the

waves, shadow green Indian Ocean that so often went profoundly blue, the white

sand, the clean gray rocks, reseda-colored brush and deep tones pushing

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against the high dunes' white, the long, long, long stretch reaching from Cape

Hangklip to Danger Point off around the stupendous strand a full 50 clicks

southeast away. There I was, living on that great Cape Bight living at Dawids

Kraal partway between

Off another 80 kilometers east by southeast from Danger Point, Cape Agulhas

itself below Bredasdorp, the end of all of Africa. Imagined that I could see

Cape Agulhas from the hills behind Hermanus but was fooling myself, as is so

effortless to do there stunned by South Africa's magnificence

Meerlust, Strand, Hermanus, Caledon, Paarl, Worcester, Stellenbosch, Somerset

West, Wellington

Exquisite ocean-bound corner of Africa that's so often the crux of the matter,

that leads the future of the continent. The fix is on the Cape. Everyone

who's ventured south of the Sahara has tried to make it to the Cape beginning

with the Phoenicians three thousand years ago

That Western Cape ocean-edging Xhosa dream, that Strandloper, San, Khoikhoi

long history ancestral western home

In Afrikaans a plover is a *strandlopertjie*

In late winter there between Hangklip and Danger Point occasionally small

penguins are seen

In spring and fall migrations the wind-bent bushes are alive with passerines

"The Cape Doctor" is South African Anglopatois for the relentless wind

Even in summer, there's still air only infrequently in the serene long surf

haze high sun, but at sundown the stiff breeze dies sometimes and the paradise

flycatchers sit motionless on the wires against the dying dusk light elegant

and poised

Then over north of Natal in Swaziland, the Ezulwini Valley, the fantastic

Ezulwini Valley with the massif like an Arizona butte on the graben's other

side from where I'd stand near the house and gape, massif all pink and brown

when the sun went down

A big eroding donga cutting down the slope in front of me, zig-zag slash

through the brown and wheat yellow of the blowing elephant grass, blowing,

blowing, but the kaffirbooms weren't blowing, were stiff like any desert tree,

no winter leaves but red crescent flowers, flag-red, brilliant, vivid against

the brown

Climbing up on the highveld slopes above the Ezulwini house, bellow at the
blowing clouds and waving grass and rocks and brush. Veld fire soot on my

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wrist, a soot daub from a patch fire up here since it had last rained.

Grabbed what was left of a bush and soot was in my palm, crayon slash of

sweaty soot, not like the serif strokes of soot brushed randomly from brushed-

by graceful lines just like the marks of dune grass arched bent from the

weight of drying late-summer awns that traced patterns in the sand faceless

from the wind at Dawids Kraal

We had met out in the garden of a hotel on the Wilderness Coast, far enough

from the lounges and verandahs to assume there were no audio pickups. The

four of us sat hunched together on a low brick wall around a fountain with the

musty smell of boxwood and peatmoss stronger than the flowers

The mountain behind the Ezulwini house called Sheba because Rider Haggard had

lived for a while in the Swazi Inn up valley near the capital

When I climbed Sheba and looked out, the awareness often came that all over

all of Africa always there has been life and continuous consciousness as there

has been nowhere else

A note from a journal when I lived in that house: Dark now outside. Hear the

water spouting from the fill pipe splashing in the pool. A monkey scream

faint and distant up on the mountain. Probably a leopard taking one from

where they sleep in the trees up underneath the krans, The fire's burning

down but there's more wood right out in the hall

Leaving southern Africa for Tanzania involved waiting for three days hidden in

a room in the back of a trading store in Gollel in the southeast corner of

Swaziland. Then an ANC friend came in an old yellow Mercedes at night and we

drove high up on the ridge of the Lebombo on the road leading to Ngwavuma and

stood in the dark with Swaziland behind us looking down into the mist of low

stratus clouds blowing in from the Indian Ocean across the narrow strip of

what was then still Portuguese territory. A Land Rover with Natal plates

appeared to take me on to the Zululand coast just below the Mocambique border,

I didn't know the driver, he was a Coloured with hazel eyes. It was high

tide, there were four others, all Africans, waiting under the trees by the

lagoon, a quarter moon, ferried out through the surf in an outboard to a small

general cargo vessel with Liberian registry, we were taken below immediately

for hot food and tea. Four days later we were in Dar es Salaam

And now it is all open and free and beautiful Nelson Mandela has just danced

the khoi-khoi on TV

The English from Japanese is, "Sadness, nostalgia"; "the sadness of things." □

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■

Edward Micus

Chickpeas

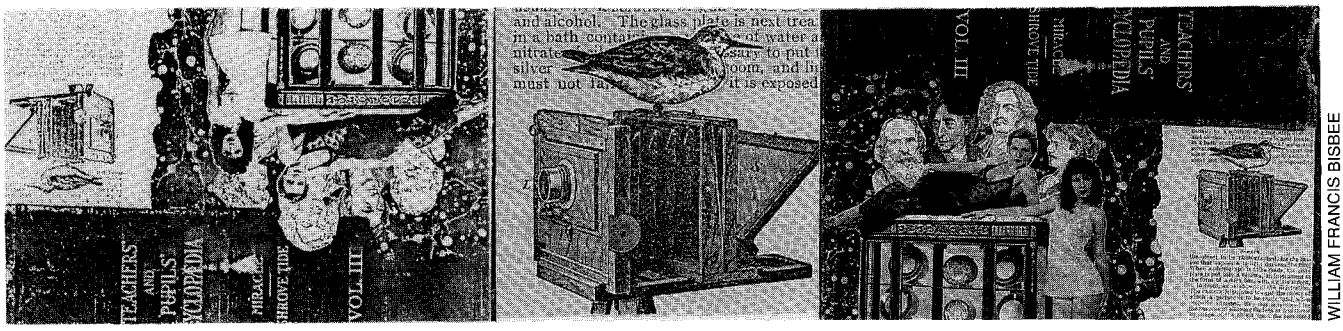
In a co-op. Off Nicollet Avenue in the middle of the block, in a co-op with a yellow awning and a canary in one window. I had only stepped in from the rain, my life clipping along just fine. This small shop, crammed with everything ever grown or dried, from avocados to herbal tea and between the squash and new potatoes this lovely woman in an apron, holding a squash in her hand, her eyes the color of chickpeas. "O.K., don't stare," my just fine life said to me, "the rain has stopped."

The next day I was back and went up to her and said, "Some of these, please," and held open the bag while she scooped them in. I still have that first pound of lentils sitting in the dark of a cupboard somewhere, waiting for Godot. Tuesday it was corn meal and rock salt, Wednesday a string of garlic which hung above her head. Two eggplant on Thursday to learn Thursday was her day off, that her name was Anna. And Friday she smiled me back my change and said, "Nice to see you again."

All the next week this went on. Isn't it queer how a man will go up to his neck in quicksand before he'll go up to a woman?

O.K. It would be Monday then, late Monday, with a scrap of wind caught in the awning, dusk with a small hand on the glass, and she was huddled over a bin of something I didn't know the name for. When she looked at me, she brushed away the hair from her eyes with the back of her hand the way her mother did. She was so beautiful you would love her in a very small room or in no room at all.

"Anna," I said, going up to her, that word a stone for the throat, "Anna," I said, "my pantry's full." □



WILLIAM FRANCIS BISBEE

Peter Cherches

Two Measures

1. Shylock

I bought a book called *Shylock*. I began to read it, but as I was reading, something began to make me feel rather uncomfortable. Strange, but I felt the book was watching me read it. Could this be possible? Does a book have eyes? I tried to put the notion out of my mind, dismiss it as a preposterous illusion, but as I continued reading the sensation nonetheless remained. Eventually, spooked by the whole experience, and in a tizzy, I took a pin and began to prick the book wildly, in retaliation. Much to my horror, its pages began to bleed—real blood. This was more than I could take. I had to get rid of the book. I cleaned off most of the blood and brought it to a place in my neighborhood that buys used books. This place pays based on weight, so I put *Shylock* on the scale. The book weighed exactly one pound, no less, no more. I took my payment in trade.

2. Whistler's Mother's Son

The painting known as "Whistler's Mother" gave birth to a son, a painting of the painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler. The painting of Whistler, in turn, painted a painting of its mother, the painting of Whistler's mother. This painting, the painting of the painting of Whistler's mother, painted by the painting of Whistler the painter, gave birth, but this time to a daughter, a flesh and blood daughter who turned out to be the real life Whistler's mother. This daughter, Whistler's mother, gave birth to a son named James Abbott McNeill Whistler who immortalized her in a painting known as "Arrangement in Gray and Black Number 1."

□

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LILI

A Story by David Hellerstein

You're big, I'm amazed you're still working," Jay said.

"This is my last night, I'm off after this," answered Lili.

"Well, you deserve it. Tomas here tonight?" Hands saffron-yellow, arms sudsy and elbows dripping, they flirted while scrubbing into L&D.

"Oh, yes. Not that I've seen him—he's in MRI all night."

"So you get a few weeks off beforehand."

"Yeah, if you count sitting in 95-degree weather in a one-bedroom apartment with a three-year-old being off."

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

"Here we go! Number six and counting."

Down the marble-floored corridor came Sister Jolie, wheeling Mrs. Oquendo's gurney toward the delivery room. Age twenty-three, aortic regurg, poorly-controlled juvenile-onset diabetes, pressures bubbling past 210/140—a sweaty, thrashing Botero. Deep groans, Ai! Ai! Ai!, her head whipping back and forth across the plastic mattress, purplish bare belly shaking, legs flailing.

"Don't push!"

Planted between her legs, gloved fingers rounding the crowning skull, he cut a generous episiotomy, and was drenched—suddenly—in hot fluids as he eased out the clotty forehead, the chin, the wrinkled blue shoulder. Finding the mouth free, suctioning mucus away ("Okay, now push, push!")—he painstakingly extricated an enormous baby boy ("*¡Felicitas, Señora!*"). He clipped the umbilical cord and made a handoff to Sister Jolie, who wrapped the floppy infant, doused his eyes with silver nitrate, and passed him to Lili Cambok.

Lili went to work, doing pediatrician things.

Jay watched: her forehead crimson under the hair cover, her body graceful despite its pregnant enormity. The way Lili lifted the infant, the way she suctioned him deep down with soft tubing and checked his limbs, until finally satisfied that, yes, once again they'd beaten the odds, and how then she placed him in the heated incubator (an entirely unnecessary gesture, since the entire Lamb radiated with the New York sun's August primordiality, making each one of them glow like a red dwarf star)—just watching her brought a sense of equanimity, of inner calm.

Jay gently pulled out the placenta—plop! in a silver bowl—and reached his hand deep inside Mrs. Oquendo's fiery womb for remaining fragments.

"False alarm. Guess we didn't really need you here."

"God! I have such a headache!" complained Lili. Later he would try to recall how she said it, time and again, trying to discern any particular urgency in her voice.

OSIE L. JOHNSON JR.

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"How're we doing for the rest of the floor?" he asked Sister Jolie after Mrs. Oquendo was safely in Postpartum. She filled him in: five more *mujeres*, all at least three or four hours away from delivery.

"Then I'm cutting out. I've got an acute asthma in the ER," said Lili.

"Okay," Jay said. "We'll call if we need you."

They stripped off gloves, masks, caps, shoe-covers, stifling blue-cloth gowns. Both of them were soaked—God forbid The Lamb's AC should be fixed before Labor Day!—clothes pasted to skin, hair wet against foreheads and necks. Even so, Lili looked gorgeous: freckled, tousled, affectionate. The way she smiled at him...he had always envied Tomas for having married her, but never more than now, seeing her *enceinte*, bursting with new life. More than once, she'd inhabited his dreams.

"What's your order? Two slices, green pepper and onions, and large Sprite?"

"No onions, they're making me nauseous." Lili straightened, put a hand against her aching lower back.

And that was that. Jay had some postpartums to check; Lili had to go down to the ER by way of the Peds ICU, then no doubt there'd be a few preemies to tune up in Neonatal. Just as he was the only OB on tonight (unless you counted Ponka, the rotating surgery intern, currently floating around the ER and basically useless) so too was Lili the only pediatrician on tonight for the entire 450-bed hospital, covering the PICU, neonatal unit, L&D, the ER—the works.

"See you at midnight," he called as she walked away. Pizza delivery time for all dozen-or-so moonlighters.

Off she went, and Jay returned to Labor, where women groaned and sweated, trying mightily to land their babies in the world.

It was where they worked, but where they'd never go as patients. The Lamb, that is. They rotated through as medical students, they moonlighted (illegally, in violation of their contracts) during residency and fellowship training, they supplemented their private practice incomes (covering malpractice premiums and receptionists' salaries) once they opened up their private offices. But God forbid they got sick—really sick—when they were in that part of the world: they only prayed that they could snag a gypsy cab across the bridge to Manhattan and get to a real hospital in time.

And yet, all agreed that The Lamb was a remarkable place. Located on the rim of the South Bronx, in a blasted no-man's-zone between the turfs of a dozen different ethnic groups, Dominican, Puertoricano, Italian, Jewish, Senegalese, Mississippi black, the tall yellow Victorian buildings of The Lamb stood behind a rusted cast-iron fence, absorbing the endless ills of their community, providing at least some semblance of healing. The Lamb's trauma team was justly world-renowned, due to a steady stream of gunshot and stabbing victims, drive-bys, immolations and MVAs-by-DWIs that the neighborhood beneficently provided. Its other services were, to put it mildly, variable. Nevertheless, medical students and residents never minded rotating through The Lamb, if only because that was where they could treat tertiary syphilis and cholera, and where they could try their hand at learning whatever (subclavian line placement, valve replacement, reconstructive surgery) with the least hassle should the procedure go awry.

The Lamb's true character became most evident around midnight, when Manhattan's equatorial roar had faded to a dull grinding hum, and the neighborhood's streets came alive with the cheerful rattle of semi-automatic weaponry, when dazed doctors tended to the endless stream of patients arriving at the ER, and skeleton-covered the inpatient floors, resolving one incredible emergency after another unencumbered by the annoyance of nurses, techs, aides and so on, and where they perfected the art of night-flying the ICU without the landmarks of reliable lab results. The Lamb's laboratories, questionable at best, sputtered to a halt once the last supervisor signed out at eleven-fifteen, and other support services quickly followed suit.

Over two or three years moonlighting at The Lamb, delivering an average of fifteen babies per Saturday, Jay had gotten to know the dozen or so other other MDs who also took that regular shift. All day, they'd be scattered through the echoey, drafty, marble-floored wards, running past each other on their way to or from the ER or the operating rooms. When pizza hour came, anywhere between midnight and two a.m., they were universally beeped to X 2222, the ER's number, and for the next forty-five minutes, all Lamb patients were on their own. Dumped in the chapel (where most recently a single human foot, in Reebok, had been discovered in the confessional) would be a stack of pizza boxes, a case of lukewarm soda, and a bag of plastic silverware that melted the instant it touched hot cheese.

There was Rogers, an internist who'd trained with Jay at Manhattan Medical Center, and Longhin, a neurologist who had the pleasure of declaring brain death for that part of the world, and Kilmer the psychiatrist who took care of would-be suicides and O.D.s. And six or eight others—including Tomas and Lili Cambok, radiologist and pediatrician respectively, a married couple who were moonlighting at The Lamb to pay off med school loans. Lili he'd known for years. At first she'd been a fearful third-year med student—stringy-haired, always in jeans, five earrings in her right ear--clumsy with forceps and sutures, unable to do the simplest delivery, always bursting into tears. Later, he'd encountered her during her residency years, after she found her vocation. She'd been transformed entirely,

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had become confident and assured, resuscitating the least hopeful 1500-gram preemie, working with assurance with the red dwarfs in the Pediatric ICU, able to thread IVs into the most minuscule veins or to pass airways down tiny collapsed tracheas, always calculating acid-base balance and antibiotic dosages with utter (and well-deserved) confidence. And now, moonlighting during her Fellowship, she was one of the few consolations of working nights on the brim of Hell. These days at pizza hour, Lili would show pictures of Charlie, her 3-year-old, a cute little chubby blond kid, and talk about how he was reacting to the idea of having a younger sibling. She usually had a question or two about her pregnancy, which Jay would answer—then, lifting a plastic knife, he would generously offer to do a C-section then and there.

Tonight was Jay's turn to order the pizza, so as the evening wore on his beeper continually sounded: Two large pepperonis, one mushroom, one sausage, a couple of heros, assorted slices including Lili's green pepper....You telephoned Smilin' John's around 11:30 p.m., then hoped they'd page you once the delivery truck had successfully negotiated the lightless wreck-strewn curves beneath the Cross Bronx Expressway.

Tonight OB was quiet: Six empty beds, no particularly acute medical problems among the moaning, sweltering *mujeres*, plus Sister Jolie was On (she being capable of performing nearly any function an OB could do, lacking only the MD after her name). One pre-eclampsia, one frightened primip thirteen-year-old, a mournful Cubana whose Spanish nobody could decode, and two possible C-sections, including a Jehovah's Witness who refused everything, even IVs. Exhausted—this being his third on-call this week—Jay lay down in a vacant Labor bed, immersed in the none-too-distant Bronx-song of squealing tires, elevated-train rumbles, shots and shouts and boomboxes.

A number of times his beeper sounded: X 2222. Too late: order's already phoned in! Finally, around midnight, he stretched, poured himself a cup of orange juice from the refrigerator beside Sister Jolie's desk ("Want anything? A slice of Sicilian?"), splashed water across his face, and wandered down toward the chapel.

There he found the usual stack of white boxes, the warm Cokes, a handful of hungry docs. Rogers, Longhin, Tomas Cambok. They each grabbed a couple of slices, put them on soggy paper plates. They sat in dusty pews, eating, comparing notes for the night: the place was hopping, with a multiple motorcycle accident on the Cross Bronx ("organ donors," Longhin called them), a bodega shooting (robbery gone awry vs. numbers dispute, story unclear)—trauma teams going in three O.R.s. The wail, shriek, beep-beep-beep of arriving ambulances echoed in the vaulted darkness.

Tomas—buzzcut hair, a limp rattail hanging in back, round red ears standing out, making him look like an overgrown ten-year-old—was talking about death: the deaths they all saw here.

"We've seen too much!" said Tomas. "I don't even react anymore." Tonight's count: four so far, and he'd imaged each of them by X-ray or MRI, seeing the track of each unnecessary exit from the world, by bullet or blade. None more than twenty years old. "It's like we've each had fifty lifetimes."

"Absolutely," said Rogers. And so many died because you couldn't find the right airway, or because the cath tray had been rifled on its way from the supply room. Because The Lamb's staff or visitors, somebody, had walked off with the essential instrument.

"Look at it this way," Jay said, "What if we weren't here? We're the best they've got."

"Right! Who could be better?" Rogers raised a Coke: they raised theirs too in a toast. "To knowing too much! The doctor's curse!"

Jay's beeper sounded again.

"Jesus! Who's that? They keep paging me!" Didn't they know the pizza had already arrived?

"Hey, where is Lili?" Longhin asked.

"I don't know, last I saw she was going to the ER," said Jay.

"I was there earlier," said Rogers. "They've got a bilateral wrist fracture in a four-year-old, possible child abuse, and they'd been looking for her."

Tomas hadn't seen his wife either.

A low turnout tonight, lots of left-over pizza. Afterward, Jay left one box in the chapel, and carried the remnants over to the ER. A gift to the staff. A hot wind was rising; Jay scraped across the asphalt corridor toward the ER, a series of 1950s temporary structures that had been grafted onto the brick Victorian buildings, whose replacement with a modern facility was always reported to be imminent, yet never actually began.

It was there—amid the flicker of fluorescent bulbs, the smell of ambulance diesel exhaust—that he came upon an incongruous scene. ER clerks and nurses gathered before the patient registration area in a high-ribbed Quonset room, its walls bright with graffiti—crowded around something—someone—on the floor.

It was Lili.

Pale, sweaty, limbs akimbo and oddly limp. He threw the pizza aside, crouched down.

"What's going on? What's going on?" someone kept asking. It was himself.

Finally somebody answered. Ponka. "Don't know."

"What do you mean, don't know?"

"Why didn't you answer your page?" Ponka cried idiotically, "We've been paging you!"

"What's going on?"

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Sister Blanca, ER coordinator, explained: "She comes in here, she says 'My head's exploding, I can't stand it, the worst headache I've ever had!' And she's moaning and she's screaming, and we ask her what's wrong, she falls down on the floor."

"And?"

"And what?"

"How long ago was that?"

No point waiting for explanations: he bent close to her. Unable to quite catch his breath. There was no response when he called her name. Pulses seemed okay, respirations too. Get a cuff! What's her pressure? He did a quick neurological. All four limbs were limp, her freckled arms, her smooth, swollen legs were without deep tendon reflexes.

Then he looked at her pupils.

Oh God!

Black, enormous moons. He shone a penlight in them. Nothing. Around him, frantic motion had begun—finally!—and people were thrusting things at him: needles, tape, airways, IV tubing.

"She's herniating!"

Within moments she had stopped breathing.

It was a miracle this had happened where it did—that was what everyone said afterward. If it happened in the parking lot, on the street, in her car, forget it! The odds that it would have happened in the ER itself, that within seconds of the time she had stopped breathing they could start CPR (his mouth against her soft, cracked lips, his breath coming back to him moist, half-sweet, half-bitter), and then not long afterward have an airway in (pediatric size, the best they could find), a respirator, that almost everything necessary would be available instantly...That was the smallest of consolations, grasped at only in retrospect. After the most unimaginable catastrophe.

In a few minutes Lili Cambok lay on a gurney, in a cubicle, a rigid tube down her throat, EKG monitor blinking above, IVs flowing, and Longhin, the neurologist, was examining her: pricking her toes with pins, shining bright lamps into her eyes, bashing a rubber-headed hammer against her tendons in search of reflexes.

All of them seemed to have amazingly little emotional reaction at the time: Ponka was jumpy, fearful, Longhin kept breathing unusually loudly, Rogers looked merely preoccupied; for himself, Jay was aware only of a slight echo to everything anyone said, and a fading of the boundaries of his vision, as though he was entering a tunnel behind her.

Tomas arrived at one point, Jay turning to see him sitting on the Waiting Room floor, in shock, face collapsed around a growing realization.

Finally, Longhin straightened, motioned Jay outside the cubicle, out into the littered asphalt-floored corridor. A whippet of a man was shouting at Sister Blanca: You wouldn' treat me like that if I was a white man! You wouldn' treat me like that! That's right, his daughter was saying, where's the doctor at? There, below his feet, were half a dozen tiny red-topped crack vials—Jay stared at them, then looked up to see Longhin's greenish face, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Forget it, Jay, she's gone," Longhin said dully.

What are you talking about?

"Brainstem infarction. Probably had an arteriovenous malformation, a bubble in her brain, been there all along, slowly growing. Burst. She's not coming back."

Silence. Or the nearest to silence you could have at one a.m. in The Lamb.

"What are we going to tell Tomas?"

We wanna talk to whoever's in charge! screamed the daughter. We ain't goin' nowhere! We want some service!

Finally Longhin mumbled: "Let's go."

"Okay," said Jay. "But I want to get this baby."

"It's going to be dead."

He stared at Longhin. "No!"

"Jay, come on. How long was Ponka standing there watching before you came in?"

"No! Damn it, I'm serious! We've been doing CPR...nonstop...it'll be okay." Something wet fell on his hand: not rain.

She lay, utterly motionless, except for the whoosh of air in and out of her chest, the bip-bip-bip-bip-bip of the monitor. He could hear Tomas—outside the turquoise curtain—still shouting, screaming: My wife is dying! My wife is dying! Why can't it be me?

He made himself focus on the patient before him: a woman in her mid-thirties, approximately 36 weeks pregnant, wearing a doctor's greens. He placed his stethoscope against the smooth bare skin of her belly, listening for the pit-pit-pit-pit of the infant's heartbeat. He closed his eyes, listening. Someone pushed him aside: Longhin, with surgical scissors, slicing Lili's clothes away.

"We going to do this or not?" said Rogers.

They scrubbed in the corner sink, and gowned up, the three of them, while Sister Blanca poured Betadine across Lili's belly, scrubbed her skin with a sponge—a brown sudsy flood—and hurriedly laid some paper drapes across her...across the operative field. They pulled gloves on.

"Where's Sister Jolie?"

"She can't leave Labor and Delivery, got a problem up there."

"Shit! And what about Anesthesia?"

"Never answered their page."

Not that any anesthetic was needed at this point. He

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wanted the others around only to provide an air of familiarity.

He lifted the scalpel, placed it just below her heart, and drew it downward, past her bulging umbilicus, ending just above her dark pubic hair: he cut deep and wide, through skin, lemon-yellow fat, red muscle—and then, with a blunt-pointed scissors, sliced through mushy, fibrous-as-melon uterus wall—refusing to be distracted by the spurt of black blood. You cut like this when you did not worry about closing the wound.

A gush of amniotic fluid washed across the table, splashed onto the floor. As calmly as possible, Jay laid the scissors aside, reached with gloved hands and pulled out a tiny red-purple, wrinkled infant. He clipped the cord, cut it, as he had done so many thousands of times before. Now, the handoff to Sister Jolie, who would shake the red dwarf to life. Of course, she's not here!

Only Rogers, Longhin, and from the back, gawking at all this, Ponka.

Dare he think it would still move? He turned the motionless, blood-stained baby over. A boy. (Congratulations, Lili! A beautiful baby boy!) But tiny, not more than 2000 grams. It—he—was wriggling slowly, half-heartedly, as if unwilling to rise into life. Jay reached a not-so-clean finger into its—his—mouth.

"Goddamn it, get me some suction!"

Spasmodic movements of the chest, but no breath, no cry. He could hear Ponka rummaging frantically through the drawers, through the delivery tray.

"No tubes, Jay, nothing here!"

He cursed. As if God could hear!

What would Lili do?

Improvise, improvise! Lili always did, whenever critical supplies were missing at The Lamb—stolen, misplaced, never ordered.

"Get me a syringe, with a central line setup, pull the needle out."

"I can't find any!"

"I need something!" Finally, desperate, he reached up to Lili's mouth, yanked the respirator mouthpiece off, tore away bits of plastic tape. "Okay, now turn to minimal tidal volume, lower the inspiratory pressure!"

Rogers ran to the respirator, jiggled with the settings.

"Go!"

Jay laid the blue infant on the gurney next to Lili's bloody thigh, opened its mouth, and, just at the right moment, stuck Lili's airway inside. Heard the gush of mucus being sucked out.

The baby began wailing.

On the bed beside her son, Lili lay utterly motionless. After a moment, out of guilt, superstition, something, Jay replaced the mouthpiece, attaching it to her tube, watching as the machine again began inflating her dead lungs with air.

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At The Lamb (and at his alma mater, Manhattan Medical Center, for that matter) there'd never been any shortage of deaths of the young. AIDS, leukemia, motor vehicle accidents, overdoses, breast cancer, a dozen other diseases carried away children and teenagers and young mothers. Each of them, Sones and Rogers and Longhin and the rest, had their stories of young endings, sad and heroic and pathetic; and as a consequence each of them had a certain gravity and wariness that was not seen on the faces of their friends who might be lawyers and bankers and professors—a burn of the incontrovertible.

And yet, in the hours and days to come, they were to be unprotected by this searing, totally lacking in detachment.

The Lamb rose to greatness that night: within moments after delivery, a nurse from Neonatal arrived pushing a preemie incubator, with O_2 already flowing. Miraculously, the baby's blood gases came back from the lab—and came back normal. From the ER, Sister Blanca called the Chief Administrator at home and got her to send in another pediatrician immediately, along with backups for Longhin and Kilmer, Tomas's buddies, who—at 3:15 a.m.—accompanied Tomas home. Jay was paged STAT up to L&D, yanked out of his stunned despair by three women in Transition. Amid loud cries, curses at all mankind, the sweaty puff-puffing of the last few minutes before birth, he ran frantically from one room to the next, grappling with new life.

Around dawn, having rounded for the last time on the *mujeres*, he gathered up the courage to walk by the Neonatal ICU.

He walked inside, passing through the rows of plastic boxes...with tiny creatures...inside...seeing him there, tiny, fuzz-headed, a lone pink face among the dozen brown and blue-black preemies. Sleeping on a ripped white cloth.

And then he was paged, STAT again, down to the ER: there he found a screeching 14-year-old with her grandmother (who hadn't known she was pregnant), back labor, the baby's head and the cord prolapsed between her legs. He freed a shoulder, and delivered her baby moments later ("Congratulations, Tanhala, a beautiful baby girl!").

His shift ended at 7 a.m. Assuming the jovial, bald, entirely incomprehensible Rumanian Dr. Vardic arrived on time.

He sank into a turquoise fiberglass chair in the ER's vaulted Waiting Room. Behind the battered metal registration desk was Cubicle 14A, where Lili lay. Her body still had not been removed, merely covered with a blue cloth, and he could see a white foot protruding.

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Now a porter was finally cleaning up, making langorous sweeps with his mop across the floor.

A rare moment: The ER silent, temporarily emptied of its infinite disasters and miracles. Suddenly overcome by questions (Why hadn't he answered the pages? Could he have made any difference?), by guilt, he stumbled to his feet and forced himself to enter Cubicle 14A.

He pulled the blue cloth aside, compelled to look at Lili for one last time. She lay naked, arms tucked by her sides, IV tubing still in place. Her belly, where he had cut in such haste, still bulged as though a baby lay within, and his hasty wide sutures barely held the incision together. It was as if an enormous red vagina had grown along her abdomen, extending from her groin to her heart. He touched her crusted, dead round belly. Her eyes, pupils still entirely black, were open, and her face had assumed its characteristic affectionate expression, perhaps by muscular habit. The strangest thought entered his mind: I did always want to see you naked! The porter had gone.

Finally, he pulled the blue sheet back over Lili, and walked through the Triage area and out onto the ambulance loading dock. Probably he should be yelling on the phone to Pathology, insisting that they come for her immediately. Instead he gazed out at the morning sky, across the rows of burnt-out tenements, to the tiny urgent cars on the Cross Bronx Expressway. What was the rush at seven a.m. this Sunday morning?

We know too much, Tomas had said.

He hardly wanted to think about it now, but he knew the bitter story of the weeks and months ahead. When young mothers died—strokes, cancer, car accidents, eclampsia—the fathers would appear ghostlike on the maternity floors, unshaven, unkempt, staring dully at the tiny infants in the neonatal ICU. Not bonding, the nurses would say, predicting trouble ahead. Social workers, shrinks, priests—all would come by. You'd hear reports, he's throwing out all her stuff at home, can't stand to see pictures of her, he's neglecting the other kids. Now he could merely begin to think of it, to wonder how he could help Tomas with the days ahead of him. Not to mention Charlie, whom he only knew from snapshots. His eyes burned.

"Dr. Sones?" It was the porter. "Sister Blanca says I should give these to you."

It was a pile of things: hospital ID, a stethoscope, a stack of 4x6 cards with information about patients, a black schedule book. Keys and a beeper and a wallet. Lili's stuff.

"Thanks," he said.

Someone else was talking to him: Sister Blanca.

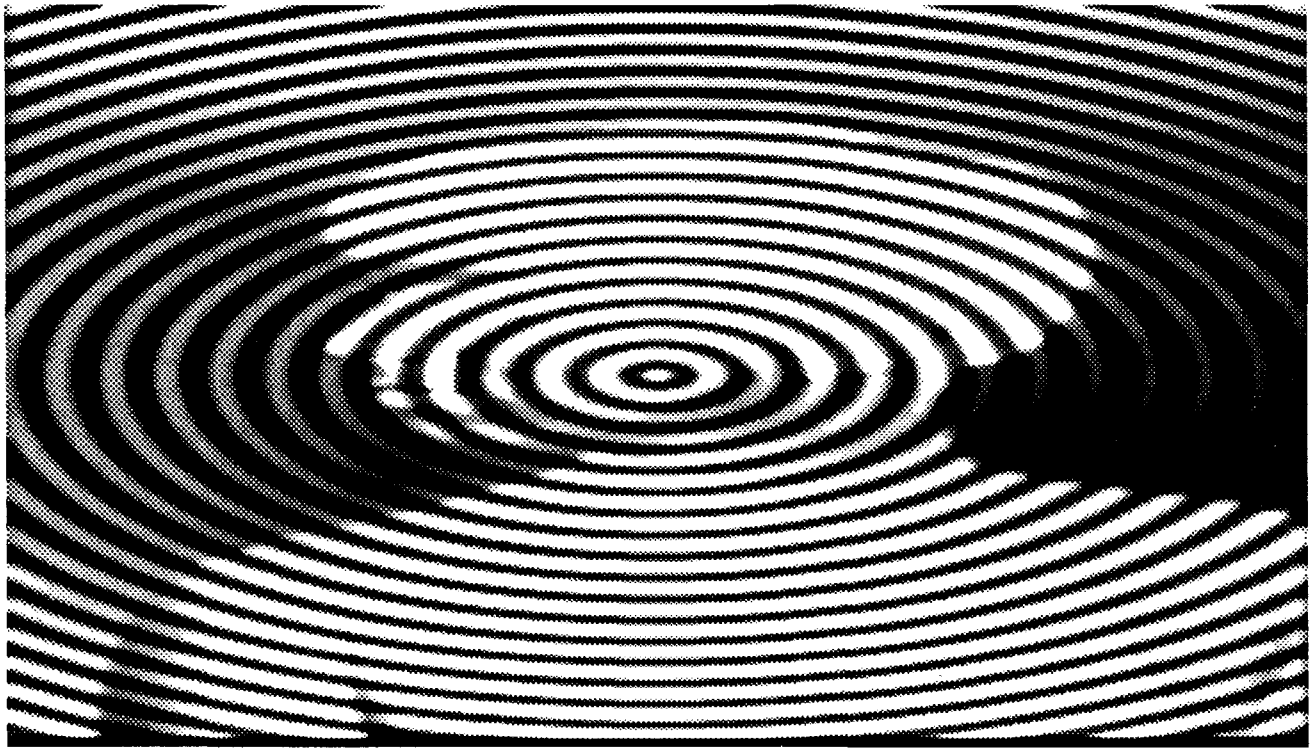
"How's the baby, Dr. Sones? What a sad miracle! What an amazing thing."

"Yes," he said.

"And how was last night?" boomed Dr. Jan Vardic, arriving freshly-pressed, well-rested, for his shift.

"You tell," he commanded Sister.

In the muggy Bronx air, he was approaching his car, then he was driving through The Lamb's black gates. Memories were beginning to cluster—images, worries, like crows on a power line. It was all he could do to hold the road. He drove the Cross Bronx toward Manhattan, into the low red morning star whose dark reflections stared at him from a million pages of glass. □



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■

Carla

LAWRENCE STURHAHN

ONCE UPON A TIME—in an age which seems long ago now—there were in our culture what were called "Mom and Pop" stores. In such places not only was Mom or Pop the responsible one—owner, manager, waiting on the clientele, but, also, their energy was responsible for the feeling in the place—its *mise en scene.*

For better or worse, change is the nature of the universe, and these days things have changed drastically (some say for the worse, in spite of what politicians proclaim). So now most establishments are part of enormous (abstract) national or international corporate chains, each plastic- looking ugly edifice a carbon copy of the other. In these modern places, the ones behind the counter are college or high school students trying to eke out a living wage. You look for the manager because something is wrong and you seek redress—what you find is some lower level management-trainee person who barely makes a living wage, too. Ask him/her who the BIG BOSS is— who's responsible for this—and they look at you askance. The big boss—? Hey, corporate headquarters is in New York, Salt Lake—maybe even Hong Kong (where the tax breaks are). Who knows the faceless executive who runs all this? Is there one at all? What you're left with is the impression that nobody gives a damn.

So, if you're old enough to remember those oldtime places—where somebody *did* give a damn—you realize something good ain't no longer around—and that's sad.

ONE DAY, IN SEARCH of a place on the south side to get my laundry done, I see this building on a corner and the way it looks attracts me. Then, I could feel this essence as soon as I walked in the door and gave my bundle of "wash cold & fold" to the smiling woman behind the counter whose name—I found out later—was Carla. I had stumbled onto a "Mom" laundromat.

The third time I went to get my wash done, Carla greeted me as always—smiling. "Carla," I said, "tell me why you're so happy?"

"Happy—? There is no reason why not. I don't have no worries. I have two wonderful kids, a loving husband. My parents are still living, and very active, and, thank goodness, live with me. And my other son—he comes home, not often, but every two, three months."

"You've always been happy?"

"You can't *always* be happy, but I don't really remember being sad. I feel disappointment, sure. There's been troubles in my life...but nothing, I think, very serious. My feet are very planted, I think, on the ground."

"Well, you're a woman. Do you know, the fact is that women are basically planted on the ground, that they're in touch with the earth?"

"No, I didn't know that."

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS thereafter Carla and I pursued a dialogue.

She was born in Italy in Tuscany, in a smallish city near Florence. With her mother and father and a brother, she came to the United States on the USS Constitution, docking in New York, 20 December 1955. She was twelve years old.

They lived in Chicago where Carla went to school. In 1963 she married a man who was from the same province in Italy. She has three children now—two sons and a daughter. The brother, a printer with his own shop, still lives in a suburb of Chicago. The rest of the family is here in the southwest.

In Chicago her husband owned a factory that made chandeliers and lamps. He had a factory also in Arizona.

Carla: "It was nice in the old days when we used to come down for holidays like Christmas. We stay for 15 days when the children were out of school, and it was nice to come down in the summer for one or two months. Very nice, peaceful.

"We like this section of the world—with all its open space. The sky was always blue, the freedom to live outside instead of inside all the time. It reminds me more of Italy, and my husband, too.

"It was hard at first, moving here from Chicago to a little town near the border—it wasn't even a town then, just a few homes here and there. Then we built a house, a huge house on top of this hill—no neighbors. Coyotes! We could hear coyotes at night, and the birds in the window."

Larry: "So you still lived in Chicago when you first built the house?"

Carla: "Yeah, but we decided it was time for us to move down here—I guess we got tired of the cold. We sold everything; we moved. But you know to live here—you know, permanent—was different. You couldn't order pizza to be delivered at the house—forget it! Or Chinese food—or let's go tonight for Italian dinner. We couldn't do any of that. But now, it's O.K. —you know? You get used to everything. And my father and mother live with us; I like that—having the family all together. He's ninety years old now and my mother is seventy-eight; they both work out in the garden, still."

Larry: "And you do the cooking —are you a good cook?"

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Carla: "I think so—people seem to think I am. But I cook because I have to cook—for the family and children. You cook...you just get up in the morning and do it. But if I have to be by myself, I order something, for the dinner..."

Larry: "Do you cook Mexican food?"

Carla: "A few dishes, not very many. But I do like Mexican food, I really do. Over here—at the end of the block, they make tortilla. Now the ones you buy in the store, it's nothing, no taste. But I go over there—I even eat it just like that; they're nice and warm with nothing inside. Nothing."

Larry: "Do you still cook Italian foods?"

Carla: "At home all the time—yes. We have pasta once, twice a day. And at twelve o'clock we sit down at a table with a white cloth. My father he won't sit at the table unless the white cloth is there—and the wine's always on the table, and we make bread... We make like ten, twelve breads every week. 'Cause my father, he's vegetarian. He never ate meat. Never. Ever. He never ate a piece of chicken."

LARRY: "So, you're husband is still working?"

Carla: "Yes, he still working."

Larry: "And you're working...why are you not just a housewife?"

Carla: (laughs) "I don't know. I just fell into this. No, it's not true. When we came finally to live down here...the boys were on their own, my daughter in school all day. I had a girl coming and cleaning the house; my mother was always in the garden with my father. So I just thought maybe I would be able to do something. I needed an encyclopedia, a book, and I called up to Phoenix, for them to send somebody down to sell one to me." So when this girl came to the house—she was a first-grade teacher—and she says 'Oh, I'm so glad you're here.' There was no other houses here then, like I told you, this house was the first one up there on this hill. And we come in, we talk, and I said, 'Is this hard to do what you're doing, you know, selling?' And she said, 'No.' And I say, 'Do you think I'd be able to do something like you're doing?' And she said, 'Why not? Come and talk to my boss.' So I drove up one day, and the boss, she's a professor—his lady was a professor! And she said, 'If you wanna give it a try, go ahead. We'd be happy to have you sell World Book.' I said, 'Fantastic.' And I'd never been out selling anything before in my life, and I said, 'How do I get people . . . where do I go? How do I do this?' And then, she said, 'I'm going to come down and teach you how to go about it.' And you know, Larry, I loved it. Selling encyclopedias. I would make appointment with the parents at night, and I was good. And I did it for a while, maybe like six or seven months. But my husband, I guess he got tired of it. He's used to seeing me at home when he comes home. And I wasn't home at night, cause that's when the parents were home from work, at their home, and I'd have to go to their house for selling. He didn't like that a bit. After that, Larry, what am I going to do, right? We start talking to one of my neighbors, and we say 'All these tomatoes, they ship them across the whole United States. How come we can't do something with the tomatoes?' We used to make Italian sauce, just the tomato, with a few spices, and we used to can them and keep them for the whole year. So the neighbor says, 'Why don't we do this for selling?' It was called Bella di Roma, and we had it at all the stores, and it was doing very well."

Larry: "Are you still doing it?"

Carla: "No, finally, it didn't work out. But I enjoyed it so much! And I'm still thinking about that sauce, Larry!" (laughs) "So who knows for the future?"

Larry: "So, how about the laundromat?"

Carla: "Ah— the laundromat.... well, my son was in real estate, and this place came up, and I went out to look at it and O.K., it doesn't look really the way I want it to, but I said 'I'm going to get it.' And you know, Larry, in just a week I bought it. And I came in here, I mean I didn't know nothing about nothing; I never worked outside the house before. And Good Heavens, was it a challenge! First of all, everything was different. I have to deal with a lot of people—but you know, Larry I have to tell you something: ninety nine percent of them are Mexican—but I've never had a child, man, or woman say anything bad, or ugly or mean to me. Just 'please' and 'thank you' all the time. It's just been wonderful, and I'm never going to give it up."

Larry: "Do you think that you've never had anybody say anything mean to you because of the way you are?"

Carla: "I don't know. A lot of the customers...I have a Mister Navarro, he walks on crutches, and he's a regular customer, and he always comes and sits here just like you're doing. And he said, 'Because of your personality you make this place stand, and grow, because of your personality.'"

Larry: "Didn't I tell you that?"

Carla: "I don't see that...I thought it was just all the work, and all the hours I put it into it."

Larry: "Well, I say the reason people are so kind to you is because you are a very warm and loving person!"

Carla: "I treat everybody the way I would like to be treated. That's all."

Larry: "That's all? That's a lot, Carla. A lot! So, do you speak Spanish?"

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Carla: "Not fluently, but I do speak Spanish."

Larry: "...and largely your clientele is Mexican?"

Carla: "Mexican, yes."

Larry: "From around here...this is actually a Mexican area?"

Carla: "Yes, it is."

Larry: "And you've never experienced any violence?"

Carla: "None, none at all! I've never been scared to be here--not at all."

Larry: "You just come and go whenever, and you have no fear at all?"

Carla: "No, not at all. I don't have no gun; if I had a gun I wouldn't be able to use it anyway."

Larry: "But you don't think that has to do with the way you are?"

Carla: "What...I don't see.... WHAT AM I?? I don't know ... Larry....."

Larry: "I suggest to you, Carla, from my point of view, my objective point of view, having been around a lot, that that's one of the reasons why, because you—"

Carla: "Is it because I'm Italian, because I was born in a different country?"

Larry: "No—it's because you are the way you are. You don't attract violence, and—in fact—people like you right off. When I first came in here I could feel it was a good place. When I first met you I felt good about you. You were smiling. It's hard not to like somebody who smiles, who radiates happiness!"

Carla: "Well, I have friends. I have a mixture. Mexican friends...I have Jewish friends. In Chicago, being in business, you meet so many people. Yeah, I have Polish friends living in Skokie and Niles, all over. And there are a lot of Italians here."

Larry: "Well, like we said, you're a woman, and they're in touch with the earth."

Carla: "Well, I didn't know that..."

Larry: "You should get out your encyclopedia and look up things about the women's movement ... not necessarily "feminism," but the women's movement, as it was once..."

Carla: "It was a very good thing."

Larry: "Most of the early, early cultures in this world were matriarchies, the gods were goddesses, and then Christianity came along and destroyed that...put in male figures as gods, and so forth. You're not aware of any of that?"

Carla: "Is that mythology?"

Larry: "No, well—yes and no. It's also history—those gods, those goddesses in those days—there were myths written about them. Yes, but basically that's the way stories come down through history, through mythology. So, your religion...you're Catholic?"

Carla: "Yes, not very strict. But yes, I go to church every Sunday."

Larry: "And you have no questions about the church, or the Pope--?"

Carla: "I have a lot of questions! I do read a lot of pamphlets that people bring in for different religions. I got two or three different bibles that people give to me, and I do read them. I think it's very interesting. And I like to know a lot of different things. Look, I got two or three— customers who give me bibles. See? And I have been reading them, I got this far in this one. I do—I mean, I have time I read."

Larry: "O.K., see if you can find something on goddess culture."

Carla: "I see religion like this. Very simple. I believe in Jesus, you know, the Father, the Son, and the Blessed Virgin. I do. I don't believe everything the Pope says...and all of that, because there are some Popes that should be in Hell. I mean, they're men—and men aren't infallible. They make a lot of mistakes. But I do some of the things, like birth control. Once you're pregnant, a child grows within you—it is life, you don't do nothing. That's why I got my daughter, I didn't do anything. And thank God, you know, she's a joy. . if I had done anything..."

Larry: "She wasn't a planned child?"

Carla: "No, she was not a planned child. We had the two boys; we wanted two children and after 15 years we didn't really want another one, but I wasn't about to even *think* about doing anything."

Larry: "So you basically believe—you were just talking about believing that women are stronger than men...more grounded than men, anyway. You kept talking about the priests are men and the Popes are men.."

Carla: "You don't want to look at them as if they don't make no mistakes, and everything they do in their religion is right. I don't think that. No, they make a lot of mistakes. You know, you don't have to listen to all they say, its mostly what Jesus taught us."

Larry: "So, you don't believe that women are stronger than men?"

Carla: "Stronger which way?"

Larry: "...more sensitive... more knowledgeable..."

Carla: "No, no. I'm not going to compete with my husband. I can't compete with him. I like to feel protected, to know there's somebody there. I know as a woman my husband's higher than I am. If I need something, if I want to talk something, I talk it over with him. And he will tell me this is this and that and that. He knows more how to go around and it makes me feel better."

Larry: "You asked him if you should talk to me?"

Carla: "Yes I did."

Larry: "So, we're talking...so what did he say?"

Carla: "He said it's up to me. I told him how the way you were, and he say 'he sounds like a very nice man, and if you don't like it all you have to do is leave.'"

Larry: "So--basically--he's accepting of whatever you want to do?"

Carla: "*Mia sempre appogiaseo*. 'He's always on my side.'"

Larry: "What does the Italian mean, exactly?"

Carla: "It means he's always been a...I could depend on him. And he would never say 'no', and if he said 'no' there'd have to be a reason he would explain."

Larry: "Do you know that the basis for good relationships is acceptance?"

Carla: "Yes."

Larry: "Trust and acceptance are the two most powerful things in a good relationship."

Carla: "Yes. I believe that very much. We've been married for thirty one years, so there must be something, right?"

Larry: "So, I want you to— I'm

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saying this to you that I would like you to understand: that the way you are as a woman, as a person—a human being—is a very very valuable thing in our culture. We need more people like you, many more people; if we had more people like you we would have less trouble. You kept telling me that there is nothing about you that is important enough for me to talk to you—right? Isn't that what you kept saying? But here, we've gone through a very interesting life, with a woman who's always worked, always done interesting things, has a nice house, a nice family. These are very very valuable things, Carla."

Carla: "They are. It means everything—family especially."

Larry: "And you're still interested, you're reading the Bible... You've got Roget's International Thesaurus right there. Anybody who has a thesaurus in her office in a laundromat has got to have an inquiring mind. This is the sign of an intelligent questing person. Somebody who has not stopped being interested."

Carla: "Yes. Life is so interesting. And I love to meet people like you."

Larry: "Do you know anything about astrology?"

Carla: "I'm Cancer. My husband's Cancer, too..."

Larry: "Cancers get along well."

Carla: "Yes, they do."

Larry: "I'm a person who has gone through a lot of study in my life, particularly in the last four or five years, and I think astrology is very important..."

Carla: "It really is like it is written for you..."

Larry: "Well, it isn't written, really, but the energy comes out of the universe. We are surrounded by energy, everything around us is energy. And the stars and planets —be they millions and millions of miles away—put energy out into space; and when a child is born under the influence of that particular energy it has something to do with the way that child's life is. Astrology is something you might be interested in too."

Carla: "Well, my father uses the moon...to plant..."

Larry: "Your family, while your father and mother work in the garden, you yourself have never really worked on the land, so to speak?"

Carla: "No. I plant...I love plants, roses, and geranium, and cypress, fruit trees—you know. And figs, you like figs?"

Larry: "Yeah, I like figs."

Carla: "Yeah, I do too."

Larry: "You see—? You're in touch with the earth?"

Carla: "There's a saying in Italian: if you plant when the moon is growing, they grow but it stalls right away.... But if you plant when the moon ..."

Larry: "So when is a good time to plant?"

Carla: "Now. Pretty soon. Very soon."

Larry: "So the moon is now just past full, so the moon is waning..."

Carla: "When it's facing east, when..."

Larry: "When the crescent is facing east it's a good time to plant? And how do you say that in Italian?"

Carla: "*Luna a ponente, luna crescenti. Gobba allevante, luna calante*"

Larry: "So—translate that..."

Carla: (laughs) "Larry! No! I don't—"

Larry: "Why not?"

Carla: "It's silly..."

Larry: "No, serious, I wanna know."

Carla: "No, Larry, no. Never mind."

Larry: "Why?"

Carla: "I never believed in this... but it worked, it really worked."

Larry: "Sure it worked, so why won't you write it down? I'll go get somebody who knows Italian and find out."

Carla: (laughs)" Go ahead. *Luna a ponente, luna crescenti. Gobba allevante, luna calante.*"

YOU KNOW, taking a leaf out of Carla's book, maybe it would be good to plant human beings like that, too-- □

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Women, Writing

THREE BRIEF REVIEWS

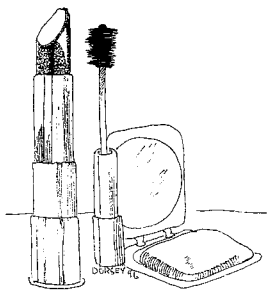
To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction, by Joanna Russ. (Indiana)

ALTHOUGH RUSS IS probably best known for her 1975 science fiction novel, *The Female Man,* this collection of essays reveals an author whose critical imagination is as adept on our planet as it is on those unknown to us. The essays, most of which were written in the 1970s, are divided into two parts: the first offers Russ's writings on technology, horror stories, sex/ gender relations in space, and the aesthetics of science fiction. The second part highlights Russ's feminist literary criticism, including essays on specific women writers— Willa Cather, Mary Shelley and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—and their craft. This seems to me a rather arbitrary division, for what is most striking about these essays is Russ's ability to use her feminist utopian vision in the service of contemporary social criticism. Russ puts it best herself:

> If any theme runs through all my work, it is what Adrienne Rich once called 're-vision,' i.e., the re-perceiving of experience, not because our experience is complex or subtle or hard to understand (though it is sometimes all three) but because so much of what's presented to us as 'the real world' or 'the way it is' is so obviously untrue that a great deal of social energy must be mobilized to hide that gross and ghastly fact. (xv)

Russ's method of critique and revision can best be seen in a pair of essays, "*Amor Vincit Foeminam:* The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction" (1980) and "Recent Feminist Utopias" (1975). In the first essay, Russ discusses ten stories by men that have as their theme the overthrow of matriarchy or gynocracy by men. As Russ points out, it doesn't matter whether the stories are set in the future, the past, or in strange worlds, the end result is the same: women who have power abuse it and hence, deservedly lose it to men who have the appropriate tools (read: genitalia) with which to keep things under control. In these stories, the turning point in the battle of the sexes occurs in the sex act itself: women successfully dominate men only by denying themselves sexual gratification; once they have experienced the pleasure of the penis, nothing can be the same.

Russ's annoyance with these versions of utopia stems from the fact that they further entrench stereotypes of women as sexual slaves and glorify the patriarchal world as we know it. As she says in another essay, ("Science Fiction and Technology as Mystification"), "It is certainly clear to me (and any other feminist) that men's and women's misunderstandings of one another, far from being due to the differences in their sexual organs or their experiences in sexual intercourse *per se,* are carefully cultivated in the service sex-caste positions in a very nasty hierarchy . . .." (38) The role of good science fiction, as she sees it, should be to imagine new possibilities, not reinforce the existing social order.



These new possibilities are found in the science fiction works examined in "Recent Feminist Utopias." Unlike the matriarchal societies created in the service of patriarchy, these feminist utopias present "societies that are conceived by the author as better in explicitly feminist terms and for explicitly feminist reasons." (134) What is interesting to Russ about these utopias is that the feminist vision of these works is strikingly similar: the authors—Ursula Le Guin, Samuel Delany, Marge Piercy, Sally Gearhart, and Marion Zimmer Bradley among them—tend not only to indict patriarchy for similar wrongs, they right these wrongs in similar ways by presenting societies that are communal and classless, ecology-minded, sexually permissive, and often manless (unlike the societies discussed above, where women are necessary as long as they are appropriately submissive). The worlds in these novels differ from traditional science fiction worlds by ignoring such issues as scientific triumph, conquest in competition, immortality and material success. As such, they give us access, according to Russ, to a growing body of works that depict a tradition of women's culture.

Russ's familiarity with and insight into science fiction and fantasy works is highly evident in this collection, but her readings of other works are also notable, particularly because of her critical and forthright treatment of women writers and women's issues in contemporary fiction. The essay from which the collection's title stems, "To Write Like a Woman: Transformations of Identity in the Work of Willa Cather" was one of the first essays to explore the ways in which Cather's lesbianism (still a point of contention amongst critics) finds a voice in her fiction. Russ argues—persuasively, I think—that Cather masquerades as a male nar-

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rator or character in much of her fiction; this guise allows her to express her desire for women. What is both tragic and revealing about her male characters' desire for women is that they are regularly thwarted in their attempts to realize their desire, a fact that is most peculiar unless it is read in the context of Cather's own thwarted desire. From a lesbian perspective, the helplessness, hopelessness and heartbreak that surround the heterosexual couplings in the novels makes perfect sense, for it allows Cather simultaneously to be "normal" in the eyes of the reading public, and to express the cultural alienation she experienced as a lesbian. Connecting a writer's work with her life may not be the most prevalent type of criticism in today's postmodern critical world, but, at least in this instance, Russ makes a good case.

Russ's treatment of Willa Cather's life and work is her preferred mode of criticism, as can be seen by the most recent article in the collection, "On 'The Yellow Wallpaper'," written in 1988 as a letter of commentary on psychoanalytic readings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story. Published in this volume for the first time, Russ takes on "literary critics' current fixation on psychoanalysis," which seems to her to be "the result of several factors: political reaction, the desire for a job and publication in a very tight market, the narrowness of graduate school education, and intellectuals' tendency to over-interpret." (159)

Russ's aversion to psychoanalysis stems from her belief that the formulations of Freud, Lacan and company do not provide the only way of reading the human psyche. What is most disturbing to Russ about the recent trend of psychoanalytic criticism is that it relies on a dangerous notion of esoteric complexity. "In a world in which mystification is one of the most used ways of controlling intellectual activity, there is seldom more to a phenomenon than meets the eye— usually there is less—and over-interpretation (always easy for temperaments like ours) becomes a plague." (160) Russ implores us, as critics, to go back to our experience—an accepted mode of feminist criticism—to do our readings. To read "The Yellow Wallpaper" as anything but a good horror story, according to Russ, not only "distorts the work and destroys its meaning" (165), it participates in an obfuscation of the text that is politically irresponsible; we ignore the feminist and historical context out of which the story comes in favor of a theory that encourages us to forget about the actual situation of women in our culture.

Certainly Russ's perspective on psychoanalytic criticism is controversial, and many would dismiss her appraisal of it as naïve and old-fashioned. Indeed, I suspect that recent theoretical developments could in many cases enhance her own readings; unfortunately, most of the essays collected here predate such trends and might be rejected on the grounds that they are too simplistic. Nevertheless, Russ's wit, straightforwardness, and general smartness make this a volume well worth reading —*Susan E. Hill*

Tudor and Stuart Women Writers, by Louise Schleiner. (Indiana)
Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives, by Natalie Zemon Davis. (Harvard)

DESPITE ITS UNASSUMING title, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* is a consciously theoretical book. Schleiner's goal is to describe how, despite a host of obstacles, English women writers between the 1560s and the 1630s managed to move their writing beyond the boundaries of their personal lives and gain access to the male-dominated realm of public or semipublic circulation. Her book discusses such better-known figures as Isabella Whitney, the Countess of Pembroke, Margaret Tyler, Emilia Lanyer, Lady Mary Wroth, and Elizabeth Cary (Lady Falkland), but also devotes space to so-called lesser writers, such as the four Sisters Cooke who, educated by their humanist father (Sir Anthony Cooke), were involved in shaping the character of English aristocratic Protestantism. Moreover, Schleiner renders accessible (for the first time) many of these women's texts by including longer passages or entire poems in her critical discussion and adding other excerpts in a fifty-page appendix.

For many readers, whose main interest might be in experiencing these texts and indulging in the success stories of early modern women who left the domain of diary and translation to excel with their own publicly circulated literary creations, the forbidding framework of contemporary theory which dominates the study will represent an insurmountable obstacle. Schleiner has encoded the writers and their lives within such a bee-hive of diverse critical approaches (e.g., discourse pragmatics, discourse psychology, Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, sociology, feminist textual study, cultural semiotics) that even the academic reader has a difficult time remembering any common threads.

Natalie Zemon Davis's *Women on the Margins*, despite its more trendy title, does not succumb to the temptation of overloading its scholarly narrative with theoretical tissue. Although one can see the likes of Marie Louise Pratt, Michel Foucault, et al., lurking between the lines of the text and crowding the extensive apparatus of notes (almost 100 pages!), the book's readability does not suffer from it. Davis, combining the knowledge of an expert historian with the narrative ease of a short story writer, tells the fascinating biographies of Glikl bas Judah Leib (1646-1724), Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation (1599-1672) and Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717), three women united by their marginal positions in seventeenth century society, their religiosity, and their expertise in the area of commerce as well as the arts.

Glikl's image of self was shaped by being a member of the vulnerable Jewish community which lived its decentralized existence in many of the urban centers of Christian Europe. Being a woman within early modern Jewish communities

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placed even more restrictions on her choices. She practiced prayer, the sanctification of her household and her body as a married woman, charity, reading, and writing. She decided to fend off the melancholy which threatened her after the death of her first husband by writing her special blend of memoir and story—to our knowledge the first autobiography by a Jewish woman. Glikl's writing, not unlike traditional (male) Jewish autobiographies, does not only serve to describe (and make her children comprehend) her personal trajectory but adds to the universal history of Yahweh's chosen people. In addition, her confessional story displays many original traces only attributable to her gender. Through her, we get a rare, personal glimpse of the many ups and downs in a woman's life in the seventeenth century:

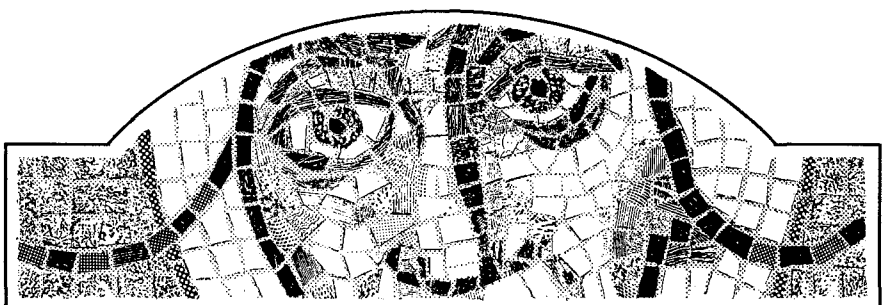
She was married at the age of fourteen, brought fourteen children into the world, and took over her husband's trading business after his untimely death. She educated and married off her surviving children before she remarried and relocated from Germany to France, only to witness the bankruptcy and death of her second husband a few years later. Glikl's seven-book account proved to be so powerful that it found its way through family copies into the hands of one Bertha Pappenheim (Sigmund Freud and Marcel Breuer's famous "Anna O." in their 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*), a Jewish feminist and reformer who published, translated, and germanified it and made it available to a larger reading public. After being labeled "undesirable" during the Nazi era, it is now back on the shelves of German public libraries.

Marie Guyart's life story only survived by chance. In his thirteenth year as a monk in the Benedictine monastery of Saint Maur in France, her son, Claude, asked his mother, the founder of the first Ursuline convent and school for girls in North America, to provide him an account of her inner life and of the grace and favors the Lord had granted her. She sent her notebooks to Claude, demanding that he keep them a secret. Instead, in 1677, only five years after she died in Québec, Canada, he published a revised version of her spiritual autobiography under the title *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation.*

In the eyes of many seventeenth-century readers, especially her Ursuline sisters, Marie soon became a typical example of "a *femme forte* such as Solomon depicted." During her life, Marie occupied two of the niches left open for women by the hierarchical church of the Catholic Reformation: the elaboration of holiness while living in this world as wife and widowed mother; and the development of a teaching vocation in a new Order for celibate women. A mother at eighteen, a widow one year later, she supported her son by working in her brother-in-law's business until Claude was thirteen years old. Then she followed the power of her mystical convictions and numerous theological visions and joined the Ursuline order, a path which lead her to labor with the Jesuits in establishing the French colony of Québec as a new spiritual kingdom.

Her writings bear witness to how religion provided her with words to interpret the abandonment of her son and her many periods of doubt and affliction. When she finished putting together her autobiographical *Sacred History* for her Claude, she had been elected mother superior three times for six-year stints and had learned to teach and write of God's mysteries in four languages, composing catechisms, prayers, and dictionaries in Algonquin, Iroquois, and Huron. Unlike many of her Jesuit counterparts, Marie always found her Amerindian students fully capable of becoming "very good Christians." She died blessing the "Savage Seminarians" around her bed, preferring them over the French pensionnaires, and whispering in her final agony, "Everything is for the Savages." Undoubtedly, she had felt a strong similarity between her interior life and spiritual capacities and those of Amerindian converts, thereby almost effacing the boundary between "savage" and "European," and challenging the assumption that among Christians in Canada the French need always be dominant.

The story of Miria Sibylla Merian, perhaps the most famous artist-naturalist in the Early Modern period, brings Davis's volume full circle. Like most women artisans of her time, Maria Sibylla was born into a family circle of artists—in her case a cosmopolitan setting in Frankfurt which welcomed her talents and ignored the contemporary



July 1 -- Aboard the Black Sea ferry, en route to Samsun, Turkey
The sun went down around 9:30, into a calm sea. I've been reading Byzantine history books lately, concentrating on the end of the first millennium. "If apocalypse is imminent then all forms of earthly authority are irrelevant."

July 2 -- Docked, in Sinop, Turkey
Delicious cold grilled eggplant in yogurt sauce, at an only halfway picturesque harborside cafe.
Paul Alexander, author of "The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition," was a German-Jew who fled the Nazis, first to *France*, then the *U.S.* He didn't return to *Europe* until the Sixties, when he went to *Paris* for research. At the Bibliothèque Nationale, he applied for a reader's card; the clerk asked if he'd ever had one before. "Well, yes, in the Thirties," he answered. "Just a moment," the clerk said. She disappeared for a bit, then came back carrying his old application. Alexander looked at it. After a longish while he said, "A lot's happened since then." "Not here Monsieur," murmured the clerk.

FROM "ICONOCLASM IN PONTUS" M. KASPER

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prejudices about the dampening effects of the female temperament on genius. Thus she was able to learn drawing, watercolor, still-life painting, and copperplate engraving from her stepfather along with his male pupils, one of whom she ended up marrying. She published several editions of copperplate representations of flowers and insects and seemed to be living a "normal" family life when—under the influence of radical Protestant spirtuality—she converted to the Labadist sect and went through a complete rupture with her husband, family property, and worldly pride. After six years of "chrysalis," of hidden growth and maturation, she returned to the business-like world of Amsterdam where she resumed teaching and painting and found important buyers (e.g., the Amsterdam Botanical Garden) for her watercolors of flowers, insects, and birds. Finally her boundless curiosity and entrepreneurial spirit made her move—a single middle-aged woman—to colonial Suriname, where she encountered ever more colorful and scurrilous specimens for her work as an artist/ naturalist.

The texts accompanying her artwork often take on an ethnographic tone as she discusses slavery, suicide, and abortion in the Dutch colony. Like Mary Guyart, she abandons the conventional negative generalizations about Amerindian and African "savages" (a term she refuses to employ) and rather criticizes the sugar-possessed European settlers. Drawing on her experience as a woman, including conversations with women, and embedding what she heard and saw in her idiosyncratic scientific style, she presented a way of thinking about non-Europeans which moderated claims of superiority made by most of her male counterparts.

On her return to Amsterdam, she published the *Metamorphosis of the Insects of Suriname* and worked hard at promoting it with possible subscribers. Would it not be appropriate, she asked one of her English correspondents, to send an illuminated copy to Queen Anne of England, "coming from a woman to

SARA SPROLES

Loring Park

I'm still wearing Saturday night,
its moist eyeshadow and leather,
its lingering cigarettes. Stepping out
vinyl like onto LaSalle Avenue,
blurred triangular towers downtown
viewed through fog, yellow vans
emerge from some soft infinity
carrying peaches and mangoes,
a sign says EAT LATE. I did.
I cross the carless street
and wait by the still grilled buildings:
Pad Thai, the Sahara,
Sal's Meat Market, the Rainbow.
A sweatshirted man stands at the light,
sweating milk in a plastic bag.
A woman with a cartful of coats passes,
her humming voice pitching down
some uninvented scale, one wheel
clicking and catching on the cement
as she turns, her woolsweatered back
erased in the gauzy beaulevard's
miasma of sepia streetlight.
A distant window slams slicing a high
ungendered laugh. *The Pioneer Press* says,
McGOVERN: POET AND STATESMAN.
RAIN CONTINUING.
It pours on my paper bag
walking home and fiftyish women fly
like lacerated pigeons into doorways,
shaking out their furcollared coats.
The elevator smells like cold.
My keys scatter on the floor.
You're asleep, white on the black bed,
a wet paper blown against wet cement.
My face falls against the quilt,
its handsewn weave opening up
like freeways crisscrossing on a map
of cities and states, the tangling and loosening
of these days severed by sleep.

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a personage of the same sex"?

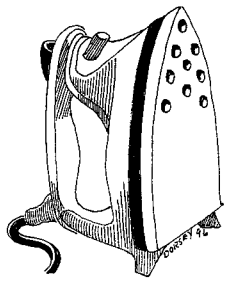
The general acceptance and distribution of her watercolors and publications made her famous all over Europe. At the time of her death, most of her books had already come out in Dutch, French, and Latin; later, Linnaeus cited her and employed "Merianella" as a name for one of the moths in his classification; Peter the Great and his successors acquired her watercolors for the collection of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg where they were displayed along with the Rembrandts in the *Kunstkammer*. And, in 1907, her paintings became instrumental in sparking Vladimir Nabokov's lifelong passion for entomology. Rummaging around in the family attic, he came across some of his grandmother's books. He hurried downstairs with "glorious loads of fantastically attractive volumes," Maria Sibylla's book on the insects of Suriname the first among them. Natalie Zemon Davis's *Women on the Margin* just might have a similarly long-lasting effect on readers looking to find out about the artistic and spiritual paths of Early Modern women. —*Richard Utz*

Natalie On the Street, by Ann Nietzke (Calyx)

NATALIE, the pseudonymous protagonist of Ann Nietzke's documentary narrative of a bag lady's life on the winter streets of L.A., is compelled to keep moving. From block to block, pushing her shopping cart of worldly goods from one corner to another, always needing to gather her possessions and her identity from place to impermanent place, she is an irascible character, almost impossible to like. "There is no simple way, no easy or uncomplicated way, to look into the face of a filthy old woman on the street," Nietzke begins her tale. But because of Nietske's skill as a writer, the reader ultimately feels sympathy for Natalie and her plight.

Natalie is driven by voices—and police—that warn her to stay on the move. Residents complain when she stays in one place too long. Eventually in her passage from one place to another through her "neighborhood," she ends up on the corner of the street, clearly in view from Nietzke's urban lower-middle-class apartment. Nietzke is familiar with the workings of the Los Angeles services for the homeless, and though she has evident power to "remove" Natalie, she tries instead to approach her, befriend her, prepare her to enter a shelter.

In an ironically titled opening section, "Home Free: Natalie on the Street," Nietzke sets the stage for her opening encounters with Natalie. She ponders the meaning of homelessness and lyrically complicates our understanding of our own essential homelessness—how we disguise our vulnerability by surrounding ourselves with possessions, walls, and addresses. Perhaps what is most effective about this section is how Nietzke shows us that even Natalie— "put outdoors," as Toni Morrison would say—surrounds herself with her bags, her rags, and the necessary "containers" for her excrement, making of her corner a space where she eats, sleeps, defecates and—eventually, with the help of Nietzke—bathes and refreshes herself.



It is Nietzke's attention to physical details that brings Natalie, ill, undernourished, filthy, and combative, most vividly to life. Nietzke tells how she helped Natalie to dispose of her waste and eventually gain the courage to wash her body, not once, but several times, during her stay on the street. Another testimony to Nietzke's power as a writer and her compassion as a person is her ability to create, out of her respect for Natalie, a kind of privacy in the public space of the street.

The major section of the book, "Striking Home: A Daybook," is Nietzke's painstaking account of a six-week period between November 5th and December 16th. During this time she daily brought Natalie warm soups and hard-boiled eggs. (Nietzke worries about bringing Natalie too many eggs, but they seem to be the perfect food: they can be eaten warm or cold and don't quickly spoil.)

Natalie tells Nietzke stories of abuse, of anal rape, of how "He" tells her not to do certain things lest she be punished. In many instances, Nietzke simply tells Natalie to pay no attention to the voices, to tell "Him" to go to hell. Natalie is greatly amused by Nietzke's boldness and defiance in the face of presences that Natalie herself is terrified by.

Nietzke herself never participates in Natalie's condition. She brings Natalie food, water and the containers for excrement; she takes away Natalie's waste and tries to urge her into a shelter, but she never directly involves herself in Natalie's drama When Natalie is forced by the police to move on, Nietzke watches from her apartment window as the homeless woman, encumbered by dozens of bags, pushes her way slowly and painfully up the block, but suppresses the desire to help Natalie by assisting her in the move.

Nietzke never perceives herself as a one-woman savior of her subject. Instead, she enlists the help of the social service organizations formed to help people like Natalie, and eventually does get Natalie "off the streets"—but she does so with the help of several others, even one or two residents of the neighborhood who are equally concerned for Natalie's safety as the winter approaches. And Nietzke never tries to disguise the fact that Natalie's presence and condition put a strain on everyone. There are days when Natalie so discourages Nietzke that she is unable to venture out to aid her. It is this level-headed honesty and forthrightness that make Nietzke's narrative so gratifying to a reader who feels simply drained of the energy it takes to help the homeless *Natalie on the Streets* should appeal to casual readers as well as to readers in the field of helping the psychiatrically-needy homeless.

—*Susan Rochette-Crawley*

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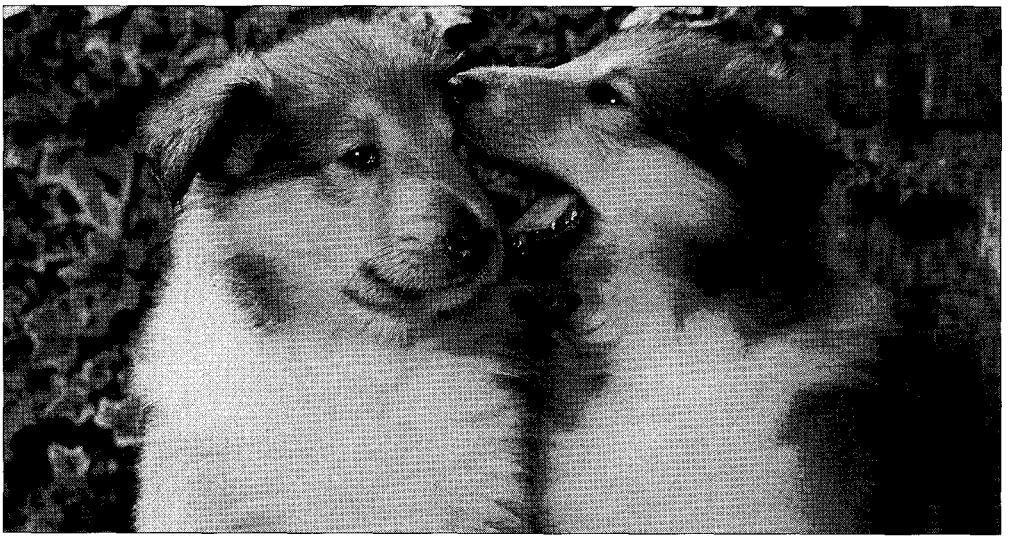
You wouldn't wear these.



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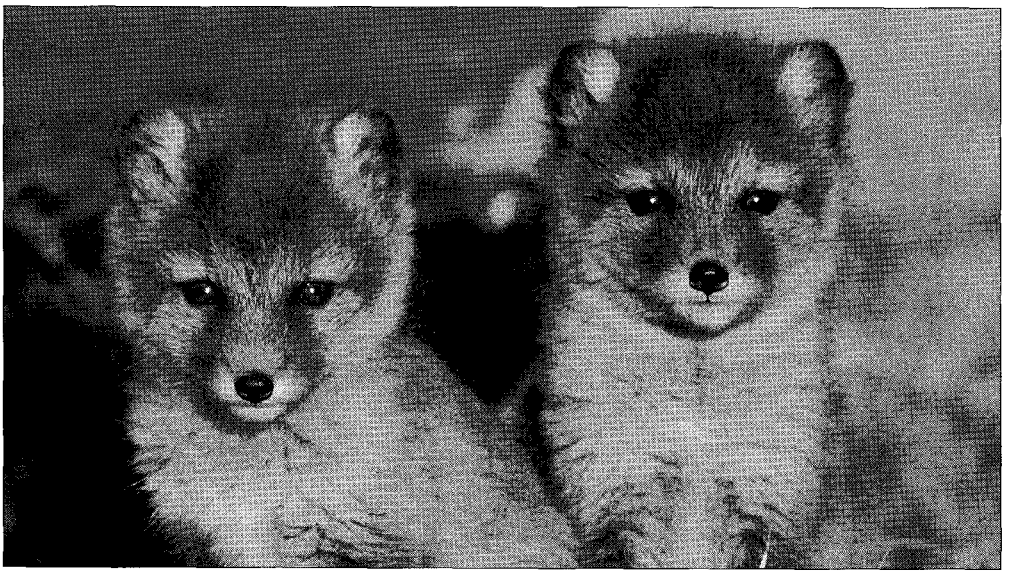

Canine.

Why would you wear these?

They're cute, fluffy little bundles of love—we take them into our homes and our hearts, and we make them part of our families.

Or at least we do that for the puppies in the top picture. The young foxes are from the same canine family, but they'll be caught in traps, or forced to live in confinement and then electrocuted just for people to wear on their backs. It doesn't make sense, does it?

For more information, contact The Humane Society of the United States.

HSUS

The Humane Society of the United States
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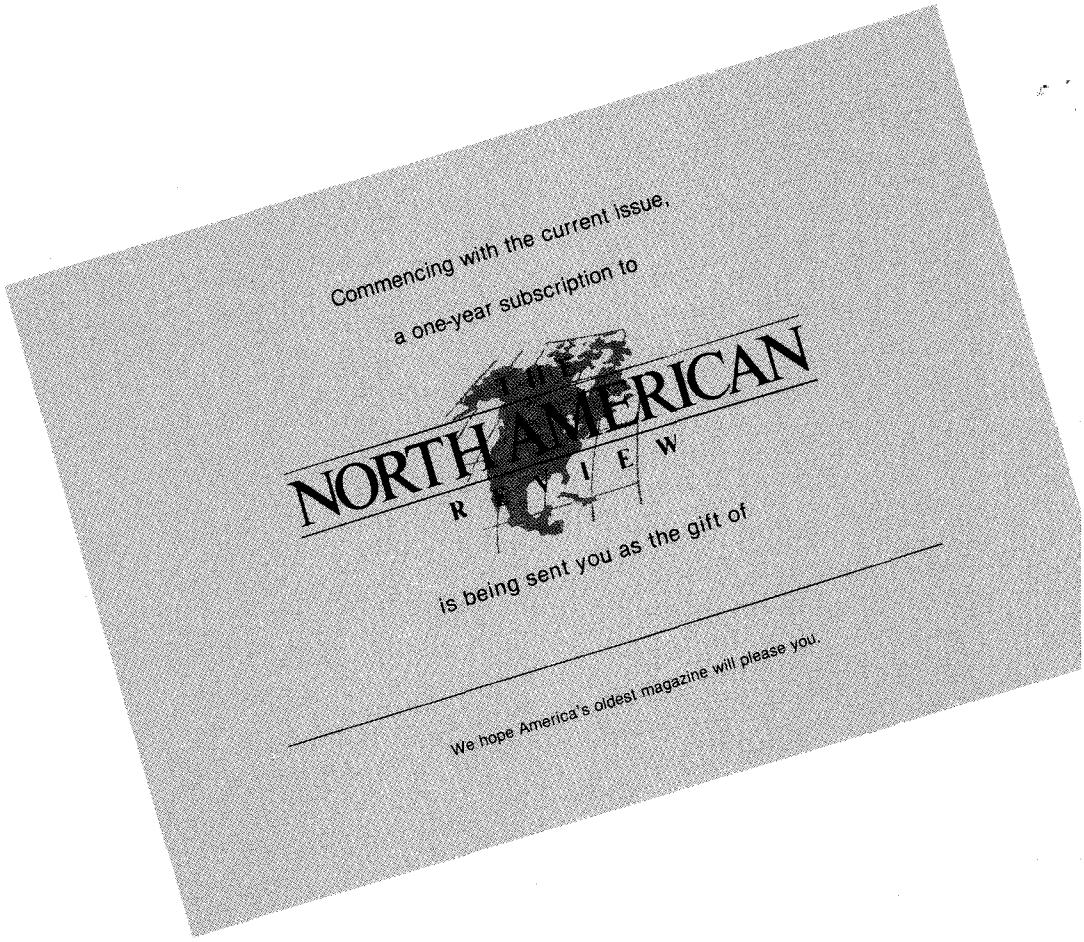
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